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THE CHEQUERED CRUISE

By RALPH STOCK

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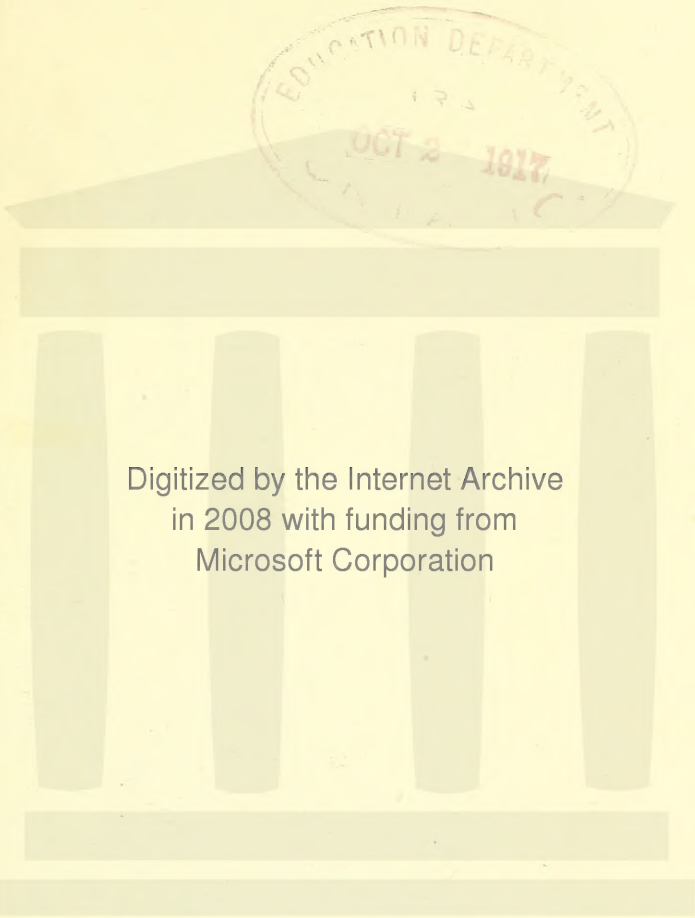
THE CHEQUERED CRUISE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The "official" Farewell

THE CHEQUERED CRUISE

A TRUE AND INTIMATE RECORD OF STRENUOUS TRAVEL

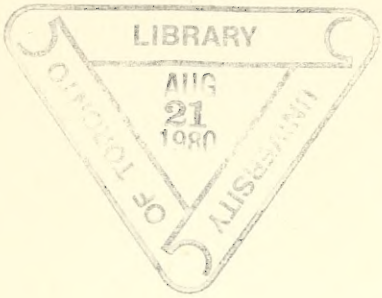
BY

RALPH STOCK

AUTHOR OF "CONFESSIONS OF A TENDERFOOT," ETC.

WITH FORTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1916



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To
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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. INTRODUCING THE FIRM	13
II. ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN	21
III. THE "WANDERLUST"	40
IV. THE BEST LAID SCHEMES	53
V. A LESSON IN PATIENCE—AND OTHER VIRTUES	66
VI. LAND!	84
VII. LORD HOWE	98
VIII. DISASTER	109
IX. SALVAGE	121
X. NORFOLK ISLAND	130
XI. FIJI TO-DAY	141
XII. THE FIRM DISPERSES	156
XIII. THE LETTERS OF THE SPINSTER AND THE NUT	170
XIV. THE CLIMAX	185

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The "Official" Farewell . . . . *Frontispiece*

Aboard the *Borax*: The Nut umpires a Boxing Match . . . . . *Facing page* 16

"Silhouetted in Company with a Neat Figure in Blue . . ." . . . . . „ 16

Ship's Sports . . . . . „ 28

"Trunk Day" . . . . . „ 28

The Nut and Freckles at Liver Drill . . „ 36

The Firm . . . . . „ 42

The *Wanderlust* . . . . . „ 42

The Skipper's "Trick' . . . . . „ 60

Mid-ocean: The Spinster at the Tiller while the Skipper "shoots" the Sun . . . „ 60

Lord Howe looms . . . . . „ 90

The Firm's Camp on Lord Howe Island: The Nut entertaining Visitors . . . „ 90

The Welcoming Committee aboard the *Wanderlust* . . . . . „ 98

Diving for Cable in Lord Howe Lagoon . . „ 102

Bird Life on Lord Howe Island . . . „ 102

Freckles and the Nut struggle with the Cinematograph Camera on Lord Howe . . . „ 106

Masked Gannet and Young . . . *Facing page* 106

Mutton Birds on Mount Gower, Lord Howe Island ,, 112

The *Wanderlust* leaving Lord Howe Island escorted by the Farewell Committee . . ,, 112

The Scene of the Disaster: Emily Bay Reef, Norfolk Island . . . . . ,, 118

Splinters of the *Wanderlust* . . . ,, 118

Cornish Quintal, direct descendant of the *Bounty* Mutineers and Rescuer-in-Chief to the Firm . ,, 126

Treasure Trove, Fletcher Christian, Direct Descendant of the Leader of the *Bounty* Mutiny, diving for Canned Tomatoes . . . ,, 126

The Day after the Wreck: The Nut and his Effects ,, 130

The Nut (in whiskers) sorts his Salvage . . ,, 130

Freckles prepares the *Wanderlust* Salvage for the Auction Sale . . . . . ,, 136

The Sale on the Beach . . . . ,, 136

Entrance to old Convict Settlement, Norfolk Island . . . . . ,, 140

The Bloody Bridge, Norfolk Island . . ,, 140

Middleton Reef . . . . . ,, 146

Recruiting Headquarters, Suva, Fiji . . ,, 146

Preparations for Invasion: Coolie Convicts building Barricades on Victoria Parade, Suva . . . . . ,, 154

The Fiji Menace (Houses made of Kerosene Tins) , 154

Typical Bush Road in Pine-apple District of Queensland . . . . . ,, 160

A Pine-apple Farm . . . . ,, 160

Slicing, Paring and Coring for Canning . . *Facing page* 166
The Boilers . . . . . „ 166
Blowing out Stumps to clear Land: The Explosion . . . . . „ 170
Soldering the Tins . . . . . „ 176
Exit the Nut . . . . . „ 176
The Ruins of Papeete, Tahiti, after Bombardment „ 180
The Club, Papeete . . . . . „ 180
Two Thousand Tons of Coal burning by Day . „ 186
By Night . . . . . „ 186

I

INTRODUCING THE FIRM

It was Freckles' idea, broached in Switzerland, developed in London, and brought to consummation at Fenchurch Street Station on the 26th of February 1914.

The Spinster and the Nut, being of an adventurous and enterprising spirit, fell in with it at once; so promptly, in fact, that it almost frightened Freckles. To find two people—and such people—ready at a moment's notice to travel thirty thousand miles, and leave relatives and friends for over a year, is a piece of good fortune too miraculous to be accepted without a certain mistrust.

Did they know what they were in for? Obviously not.

"Ripping idea!" said the Nut.

"I should love to!" cooed the Spinster.

"Do you really mean to say you're game?" demanded Freckles, still incredulous.

"Of course we are," was the simultaneous response.

Freckles studied his cigar ash gravely.

"It's great to hear you say that—like that," he admitted; "but before going any further, I

must enlarge. The kind of thing I propose will hardly be the *Grand Tour*. There will be hardships—real hardships, I mean—mosquitoes, probably fever, bad food sometimes, worse accommodation at others, and—well, I can't do the thing in a private yacht, that's all."

"But we don't *want* to do it in a private yacht," protested the Spinster.

"Nothing quite so boring as a private yacht," added the Nut.

"I'm telling you this," Freckles continued, "because I know you could do it that way if you wanted to, and will probably wish you had before you've finished."

The Nut looked pained.

"I want you both to understand that we're going to do this *on the cheap*, with all that that means."

Freckles paused, but there was no response. The gaze of the Nut and the Spinster did not falter.

"I propose—simply because I have no money to speak of myself—that we do the whole thing on one hundred and fifty pounds each."

The Nut blinked.

"Yes," triumphed Freckles, "you are wondering how anyone—especially a Nut and a Spinster—can reach the South Sea Islands, see anything of them, and live for a year on considerably less than you would spend in England in six months. I propose to show you, provided you both promise

not to take a penny more, nor to cable for money while away. Is it agreed ? "

They were supping at London's best restaurant at the time, and the Spinster caught the Nut's eye across the table. With such a look did the early martyrs go hand in hand to the slaughter.

" I agree," she said, fastening her unwavering glance on Freckles.

" Me too ! " said the Nut. " I don't quite see how we're going to do it, but if we do, I shall have saved—let me see——"

" Expenses work out at three pounds per week for a year," prompted Freckles.

The Nut's expression was one of deep thought.

" It's rather too many for me," he said. Then, brightening visibly : " But it'll mean polo *and* a car, instead of polo *or* a car, when I get back."

The Spinster was of the same opinion, though her ultimate desires ran in other channels.

" Then may we drink to the success and safe return of the Firm ? " suggested Freckles.

Glasses were raised and the toast drunk.

" And now to business," he added, with his elbows on the table.

They talked until the best restaurant in London intimated, in its own polite manner, that it was time to leave.

" I'm all agog," said the Nut at parting.

" I don't think I ever looked forward to anything so much in my life," gushed the Spinster.

Freckles said nothing.

The next day the Nut's taxi drew up at the dingy office of a shipping agent in Bishopsgate Street.

"I want a two-berth cabin on the *Borax*, sailing for Australia on the 26th of February," he announced.

A still more dingy clerk took him in, from glittering hat to speckless boots, with a quick glance of incredulity, said "Yessir" in an expressionless voice, and held a whispered conference with a grey-bearded gentleman in glasses. The latter approached.

"I think you must have made a mistake, sir," he ventured. "The *Borax* is one of the branch line."

"It *is* the *Borax*, and it *is* the branch line that I want," the Nut assured him.

"But"—the grey-bearded one smiled apologetically—"the *Borax* is an emigrant ship. The—fare is twenty-three pounds."

"It *is* an emigrant ship, and it *is* a fare of twenty-three pounds that I want," persisted the Nut. "That is, unless you have anything cheaper."

The other mechanically produced a ship's plan and spread it out on the counter.

Presently he lifted his head.

"If you'll excuse me saying so, sir, I'm quite sure you won't like it. There will be 'assisted' passengers—servant girls——"

"I *particularly* want servant girls," replied the Nut.

ABOARD THE *BORDA*. THE NUT UMPIRES A BOXING MATCH

"SILHOUETTED IN COMPANY WITH A NEAT FIGURE IN BLUE . . . ."

"In that case——" The grey-bearded one returned to the ship's plan with an air of resignation.

An hour later, meeting Freckles by appointment, the Nut produced a printed slip with evident glee.

"'Breakfast, eight o'clock,'" he read. "'Porridge, kippered herring, vegetable stew, pickles. Dinner, one o'clock: soup, dry hash, boiled mutton, rice and prunes. Meat tea, five-thirty: corned beef, cottage pie, preserves. Supper, eight-thirty: biscuits and cheese.' How on earth do they do it for the money?"

"We shall soon know," said Freckles.

The eyes of the Nut became fixed as those of one who sees a vision.

"Pickles at eight o'clock in the morning," he murmured. "I'm all agog."

The grey-bearded one of the shipping office received a second shock that day when the Spinster fluttered into his dingy office like a stray butterfly.

"I want a two-berthed cabin on the *Borax*, sailing for Australia on the 26th of February," she said.

He looked at her, opened his mouth to speak, closed it again, and produced the ship's plan.

"Very well, madam," he said.

There followed a week of feverish preparation. The Spinster, being one of those inestimable women whose chief delight seems to consist in

forestalling the wants of themselves and those about them, proceeded to lay in a stock of every convenience known and unknown to "inexpensive" travel.

The first thing that occurred to her, however, was barter. In her mind barter and the South Sea Islands were inevitably associated, hence the purchase of a trunkful of bead necklaces, coloured cloth, fish-hooks and pocket-knives. Then there were innumerable friends to be rendered envious. Hers was a busy week.

The Nut bade a tearful farewell to his car, his ponies and his favourite trouser-stretchers, ordered six sets of tropical suiting and gave a farewell dinner at the Savoy.

Freckles bought as little as possible, and awaited the day of departure, doubtful to the last as to whether his companions' intentions were serious.

All doubt was put at rest, however, when, on the morning of the 26th of February, and in one of London's very own fogs, the Firm met outside Fenchurch Street Station half-an-hour before the departure of the "special" for Tilbury.

Out of the murk rolled omnibuses loaded with giggling girls of all shapes and sizes. These were the "assisted" passengers, about to cover a distance of thirteen thousand miles and increase their wages from a possible seven to a certain thirty shillings a week, at a cost of eight pounds. The blue and red badges at their coat lapels told

the state of the Commonwealth to which they were bound, and their faces were an open book of enthusiasm and high hopes.

The newspaper boys whistled and cat-called, the girls continued to giggle as they swarmed from the "buses" and followed the matron, who was there to receive them. One was given to speculate on the load of responsibility this worthy lady would labour under for the next six weeks.

Still out of the fog came an endless procession of growlers, hansoms and taxis, disgorging men, women, children and mountains of label-plastered luggage. Decent enough people, some distinctly superior, and all good, average examples of their race. Is England aware of this constant drain on her very life blood? Has she no need of these well-set-up men and women? Nothing to offer them in return for brain and muscle? To the onlooker it is a depressing state of affairs.

Once a month the spirit of adventure hovers over platform No. 4 of this murky railway station. Passengers hurry hither and thither, hunting for seats in the crowded train, while groups of relatives and friends stand back and watch them with forced laughter or genuine tears, then crowd about the carriage windows, offering parting gifts, which in nine cases out of ten will never be used, but treasured for the sake of the giver.

The train moves out, to the accompaniment of cheers and waving handkerchiefs, and the

passengers lean back with a sigh of relief. Already their minds are engaged with the present and the future, well rid of the past.

And the relatives and friends? Envious or content, they return to their life-long ruts. Perhaps some day the spirit of Adventure will touch them also with her magic fingers, and they in their turn will wrestle for seats on the "boat special" at Fenchurch Street.

II

ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN

At Tilbury it is the same, a struggling mass of cheerful or peevish humanity boarding the tenders and swarming up the gang-plank of the good ship *Borax*. At the rail stands a doctor, carefully scrutinising the passengers, as they file aboard, for signs of disease. All pass—save one old man with a furrowed, careworn face and straggling grey beard. Politely he is asked to remove his hat, and with trembling hand he obeys. The doctor looks down on his anxious, upturned face and shakes his head. It is enough. Gently the old man is turned about and led back to the deck of the tender, to be swallowed by the crowd. Already he has blocked the way too long; already the stream of youth, health and strength has resumed its course along the gangway.

Freckles found him aft, seated on a bulging pilgrim basket, looking dazedly out across the river.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Matter?" The old man looked up. "They won't have me, that's all."

"Why?"

"Too old, I suppose."

"Oh, there must be something more than that."

"If there is, I don't know about it. I feel all right. Look at that!" The old man expanded his chest and smote it manfully. "I was going out to my two boys; they'd have looked after me. Damn 'em!" he exploded, shaking a gnarled fist at the towering *Borax*. "Damn 'em! Lot of red-tape blighters!"

"What will you do?"

"Do?" The old man's glance wandered again across the river. "Go back, I suppose——"

Freckles heard no more; they were unlashing the gang-plank, and he ran up it in the nick of time.

"Go back, I suppose——" The words lingered with him for many days. "Back—to what?"

In the mirk across the river a few of the faithful could still be seen waving handkerchiefs, and now and then a faint "Good-bye. Good luck!" floated over the water. Then the telegraph clanged, the ship's heart commenced to beat, and she moved majestically out into the chop of the Channel.

At one o'clock a bugle call announced dinner, and there followed a headlong rush for seats in the saloon.

By well-directed largess the Firm secured places near a port-hole, the ever-thoughtful Spinster produced paper serviettes, and they awaited events. Every seat in the place was filled, and everyone apparently talking at once. Above the din occasionally rose the wail of an

infant. A somewhat soiled example sat next to the Nut, alternately studying him with a child's inscrutable gravity, and sucking a comparatively clean thumb. The Nut was constrained to look upon it, and it smiled.

Pale-faced stewards hurried between the tables, and presently, as though from the heavens, there descended a plate of steaming tripe. It came to rest before the Nut. Freckles produced a handkerchief and blew his nose violently. The Spinster bit her lip and evinced a sudden interest in a far corner of the saloon. The Nut, without so much as the flicker of an eyelash, laid hand on knife and fork, consumed it to the last mouthful and asked for more. It was from that moment that he gained the Firm's respect, since when he has never lost it.

During the days that followed there were many things to be learnt : that one of the occupants of the four-berthed cabin next to Freckles was an Oxford man, just down, and on his way to the irrigation areas of Victoria. That he slept three feet above a whilom scene-shifter, and seemed to enjoy it by the constant flow of amenities that floated over the partition.

That the dear old lady with the incipient beard and moustache had lost her luggage, and had nothing to wear but what she stood up or sat down in until she reached Sydney in seven weeks' time.

That there was a suspiciously beauteous lady

aboard, already scorned by the women and distinctly popular amongst the male element.

That there were strange tales to be heard in the smoking-room, gems of real life, recounted by men of all stations. In short, that there is nothing quite so entertaining as an emigrant ship.

Towards evening the smoking-room filled, the bar opened, and gambling began: poker, banker, vingt-et-un, and a weird game called Lotto. There was money on board, and, as is usually the case, those who had it not were the most eager to give the impression that they had. One silly youth, with a cigarette behind his ear, a vacuous expression and a runaway chin, in a state of intoxication, produced equally by beer and the impression that he was being a sorry dog, lost six pounds the second evening—every cent he possessed. Freckles asked him what he was going to do about it.

"Do?" said the youth, with a vacant smile. "Oh, it'll be all right when I get to Australia."

Australia! Truly the land of great expectations—of present-day miracles, if she can mould such material into a man. One thing is certain, in case of failure *she* is blamed; one can see this youth and his kind returning to their warrens inside of six months, cursing her very name.

Then there were the genuine topers, men who, by some miracle of constitution, can remain intoxicated for three weeks on end without reaching

a climax. One such was a wealthy prospector from the goldfields of North America.

"Seeing a bit of the world," he informed the assembled company. "Nothing like it. Firs' class no good to me—Jews and wool-buyers—give me my own kind. Did all ri' back there"—he nodded vaguely aft—"but they wouldn't gi' me my breakfast in bed at the hotel. Like my breakfast i' bed, so I bought the hotel. Doin' all ri' too; get my breakfast in bed now."

Outside the smoking-room a balcony overlooking the aft-well-deck served as a common trysting-place for the love-lorn. Here youths considerately converted themselves into animated cushions, against which the ladies of their choice —at the moment—reclined in every attitude of trustful repose, while a gramophone brayed waltzes, comic songs and washy American ballads. To the mere onlooker it was distinctly embarrassing, but apparently to no one else. The Nut said it made him feel lonely; he intended to find out how it was done.

An hour later, and in a state of suppressed excitement, he encountered Freckles.

"You walk round the deck," he said, "round and round the deck until you've settled on the one you like, then you bump into her hard and say, 'Sorry, miss.' The rest seems easy; you just hold hands and rub faces to the gramophone."

"You're jealous," said Freckles.

"I am," admitted the Nut. "I shall either

do the same or report the matter to the matron."

That evening he was seen at the ship's rail, silhouetted against moonlit waters, in company with a neat figure in blue.

The spirit of mischief awoke in Freckles, and presently an elderly lady in black, with a badge bearing the word "Matron" in gold on a red background, approached the figures at the rail.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," she said kindly, "but ladies must be in their cabins by ten o'clock. It is now ten minutes past."

The Nut was furious.

"*You* did that," he accused, when the ladies had left.

"Of course I did," said Freckles. "I'm jealous."

But the Nut's wrath had already subsided. He was staring abstractedly at the deck.

"Funny," he muttered, "very funny. Two years ago she was parlour-maid at the Fentons'. I know them pretty well, but I had no idea they treated their servants like that. Poor little beggar!"

"Pity," began Freckles, "is——"

"Oh, shut up. She had to sleep in a sort of coal-hole, got fourteen pounds a year and was treated like a machine instead of a human being by everyone except old Fenton, and he made himself a nuisance. She was sacked by Mrs F. on the spot. Then she went into a Throgmorton

Street coffee and domino dive where the Stock Exchange makes a living tossing for half-crowns, and—well, life doesn't seem to be the same as it looks to you and me."

"She may not be speaking the truth."

"Possibly; but I don't see why not; she doesn't know me from a bar of soap. Anyway, she's cleared out, engaged already by people in Melbourne for fifty pounds a year and her board. Trouble with servants!" The Nut was quite indignant. "I tell you I'm in the know now; just beginning to see the other side of the shield."

A little later the Nut was seen extracting, by means of tender interest and a glass of beer, the life story of the scene-shifter. The Spinster, too, seemed content in her daily routine of working cushion covers, reading, and helping the matron in her intensely interesting work. Freckles looked on and felt gratified. Also, wherever there was a patch of sun, there he was to be found writing—always writing.

Las Palmas was the first port of call, a week from Tilbury, and for five hours after the *Borax* had anchored in a heavy swell off a coast-line of dun-coloured hills this sleepy little Spanish town of the Canaries resounded to the laughter and strange noises of carriage-loads of Cockneys.

Atrocious roads, sand, beautiful women, narrow streets of multi-coloured, flat-fronted houses, whose open portals give a glimpse of cool, green courtyards beyond, and a general air of

parched sleepiness, gives a sufficient impression of Las Palmas.

There was nothing to be seen—nothing, that is, to interest an emigrant ship—consequently everyone met everyone else with loud cries of recognition, first of all at the cigar and cigarette *fabrik*, then at a wine-shop near the wharf, where poisonous wine of the country was consumed with gusto at extortionate prices, and the chief amusement consisted in flinging pennies at a blind musician thrumming ancient Spanish melodies on a guitar. Then back to the *Borax* in heaving launches.

There is nearly always a swell off Las Palmas, and the embarkation caused endless amusement to those on board, lining the ship's rail three deep.

To an emigrant ship, as to any other, there is something excruciatingly funny in watching—from safe vantage—a launch full of people at one moment level with the bottom step of the gangway, and at the next fully fifteen feet below it. To see a really frightened, corpulent gentleman upheld on a swaying seat by swarthy Spaniards until a roller condescends to waft him upward, and then as he clutches empty air instead of the outstretched hand of the quartermaster, to see him sink jibbering into a blue-green pit. To wait for the ultimate leap through space, and roar with laughter at his collapse on the slippery steps, leaving two plump legs to kick air as the launch sinks again into the trough—these were

Ship's Sports

"Trunk Day"

undoubtedly the chief delights of Las Palmas for the *Borax*.

A last basket of oranges or bananas (mostly rotten) hauled upward on a cord from the fruit vendors in their bobbing boats below, and the anchor is weighed and the *Borax* settles down to her two weeks' run to the Cape.

For the rest of the day—until an impromptu concert drives other thoughts into the background—the emigrant ship has much to say about Las Palmas. It would be interesting to hear exactly what Las Palmas has to say about an emigrant ship.

Via the Cape to Australia is supposed to be the coolest route, but experience teaches doubt in this direction. Certainly it is the most varied in temperature, as the steamy heat of the Equator and the doldrums is endured for a full week only seventeen days before one is frozen to the marrow by the icy winds of the Crozets. The contrast is often fatal. There were four deaths, and two unfortunate stewards went mad. This last is hardly to be wondered at. To rise at five o'clock in the morning and attend—short-handed—to the wants of fifteen hundred passengers until ten o'clock at night, in an atmosphere that rivals the stoke-hole, and then sleep in a "glory hole" infinitely darker and more restricted than the meanest doss-house; to do all this for seven weeks of an ocean voyage, at a wage of three pounds a month, is a strain that would overcome

sturdier material than that which constitutes the average steward. Why they undertake such soul-killing work is a mystery that Freckles tried in vain to solve throughout the voyage. Some enlightenment was vouchsafed when he was told that there are many desertions at the Australian ports—many, but why not all?

As a ship nears the Equator tempers shorten. In the doldrums troubles grew apace in the shape of fights, petitions of complaint to the harassed captain, and in one case a court-martial. One passenger, a thick-set, evil-looking man of doubtful origin, made himself objectionable, first by making allegations regarding the morality of several of his fellow-passengers, then by forcing his attentions on some of the women-folk. The allegations were in the main correct, the attentions merely ill directed, but both offences were dealt with in a surprisingly prompt and business-like manner. At a given hour his cabin—next door to the Nut's—was visited by a deputation, headed by an athletic-looking youth in shirt, trousers and kid gloves—these last presumably to save their owner's hands from being soiled. The victim was invited to come on deck and stand the risk of having his evil face punched into something like symmetry. This he expressed his entire willingness to do, provided the process was postponed until the next morning.

"You wouldn't have a man *out of his cabin in his pyjamas*?" he protested. And for some

reason the deputation saw justice in the objection, and retired.

In the morning—as is usually the case—tempers had cooled sufficiently for the matter to be undertaken in a more dignified manner. The maligned athlete of the kid gloves summoned a court-martial in the saloon, at which the offender was invited to attend. He stoutly refused, maintaining that he was unwell and consequently still in pyjamas and his cabin. However, he was routed out like a fox gone to ground and, still in his pyjamas, striped virulently green and pink, heard his doom pronounced. He was either to sign a public apology, which would be posted on the notice-boards fore and aft, or suffer the facial improvements before mentioned.

It is an unpleasant thing to see a powerfully built man in a state of abject fear, fighting with ineffectual words instead of the fists God has given him; so unpleasant, in fact, that the court rose as one man and the offender crumpled up forthwith. There was something refreshingly inevitable about that court-martial. He signed the apology, and for the next three days was to be seen skulking in corners or furtively watching the crowds surrounding the notice-boards.

Thus is the male voice of calumny silenced on an emigrant ship. The pity of it is that there is nothing to correspond with it amongst women. Perhaps there is—but, if so, it is singularly ineffectual.

There was some quite good boxing on the aft hatch, usually judged by the Nut, who had long since become a personality on board.

Some of the combatants had decided on pugilism as their career in Australia, and Freckles was told that well-known lights of the boxing world meet the emigrant ships, on the chance of picking up a good sparring partner or possibly "a hope" to be "managed." In the smoking-room—hotbed of all conspiracy—purses of from one to five pounds were easily raised for a twenty-round contest. Officially this was not allowed, but by fighting in trousers and shirts, instead of orthodox "togs," and carefully choosing an hour in the afternoon when the captain was known to take his siesta, this little difficulty was soon overcome.

For a full three days before arrival at Cape Town excitement pervades the ship like an electric current. People effect sudden transformations from rope-soled shoes, kneed trousers or frayed skirts and shabby blouses to such of their wardrobe as is calculated to astonish and instruct an inoffensive South African city.

These three days possess the feverish significance of a dress rehearsal—for all save those who have worn nothing but breeches and gaiters since they left Tilbury. Such gentry are a class by themselves—of the horse, horsy—and are the butt of much quiet humour in the smoking-room.

"I don't know," observes the scene-shifter, addressing the world at large, as one of the faculty

approaches. "I've 'unted the ship, but I can't find no stibles."

As far as the visitor is concerned, Cape Town is Table Mountain. This majestic, dun-coloured table-land, perpetually swathed in blue-grey mist, dominates her surroundings to the exclusion of every other feature. The city lies at her foot, dwarfed to a mere cluster of white, insignificant buildings thinning out into suburbs and seaside bungalows between her skirts and the grey Atlantic.

If you would drive, you must drive—round Table Mountain. If you would walk, you must walk along the foot or up the slopes—of Table Mountain; through beautiful red-earth avenues of oak, eucalyptus and a species of fir, it is true, but ever ready to catch a glimpse, a new aspect —of Table Mountain. With such continuous and minute inspection, it is all the more wonderful that this rugged plateau lives up to her reputation.

Cape Town itself is the typical brand of colonial city. A wide, busy, main thoroughfare, complete with clanging "trams," fleets of motor cars and streams of hurrying, heterogeneous humanity, and for the rest, a dusty, sun-bathed quietude.

The *Borax* enjoyed it immensely, doing all that was expected of her and little that was not. She left at five o'clock in the morning, her poop crowded with enthusiasts desirous of seeing the last—of Table Mountain.

Now came the most trying part of the voyage.

For two weeks the *Borax* ploughed her way through tumbling, grey waters against strong head winds and occasional icy rain. She pitched, she rolled, she corkscrewed; she did everything that was possible save turn turtle. Those aboard her grew tired of one another, tired of themselves. Even the Nut——

"How long is it to Adelaide?" he asked Freckles on the third day of the buffeting.

"Only three weeks," was the ironical reply.

The Nut fastened a speculative eye on a gracefully wheeling albatross.

"No, I say!" he murmured. Then, as one suddenly awakened to a ghastly fact: "But this is perfectly frightful!"

It was. Every now and then it strikes one with almost the force of a physical blow that three weeks—twenty-one days—must be disposed of somehow before land will be seen and new interests found. A man of any enterprise—imagination even—feels that he would like to carve away the intervening time with a hatchet. The emigrant ship has suddenly converted herself into a gaol, and her prisoners go about their daily routine of time-killing with one predominating thought—Adelaide!

"It's no good," added the Nut with an air of finality, "I shall have to fall in love."

And a little later he was seen on the balcony overlooking the aft-well-deck. . . .

Occasionally the space between the cabin

partition and the deck-head affords information as well as ventilation. It supplies a pleasant interlude when lying in one's bunk, pretending to read, but in reality praying for Adelaide, to overhear such a conversation as the following :—

" I was talking to a bloke yesterday. 'E said : ' I like these 'ere boats all one class.' I said : ' It ain't all one class, and I'll tell yer for why. Do you wash when yer get up ? ' ' Yus,' 'e says, ' I wash me 'ands.' ' Do yer wash yer faice ? ' ' No,' 'e says ; ' I don't see as it wants it.' ' Well, now,' I says, ' when *I* gets up I wash me 'ands *and* me faice.' And there's a bloke that thinks we're all one class ! "

It leaves one to speculate on the status of the over-scrupulous person who washes his neck also.

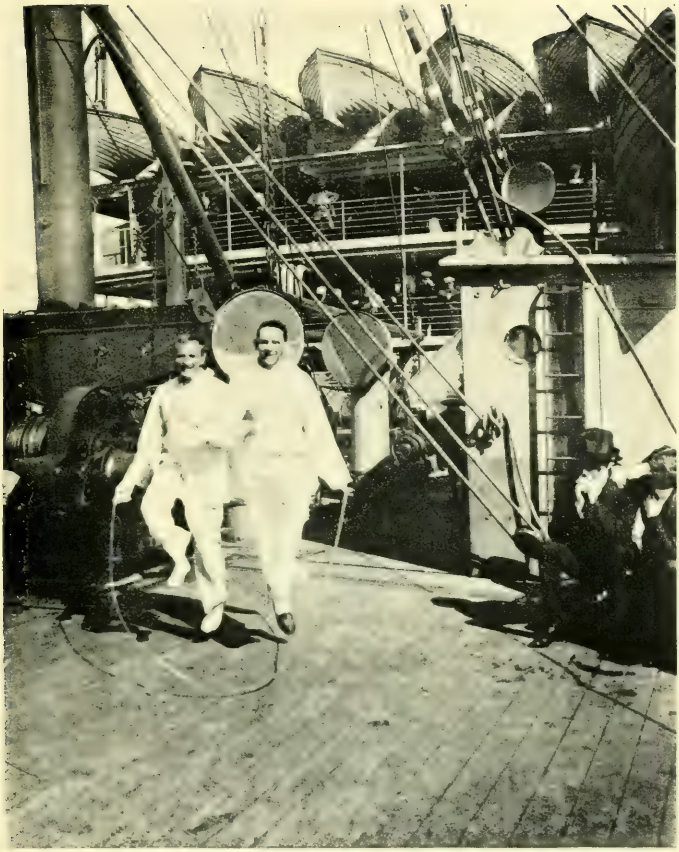
It was during these dour and apparently endless days that the effect of close confinement and idleness on the average man made itself felt. The chronic growler is always with us, but his bark seldom develops into a bite. With a healthy, normal man of small intelligence, however, it is different. He becomes so utterly tired of himself and his neighbours that he seizes any excuse for diversion. And so it was that a French youth stabbed another in the side ; a beer bottle flew mysteriously out of space, and caught the fifth officer on the back of the head ; an unpopular inmate of an eight-berthed cabin was held, fully dressed, under a shower bath ; authority of any kind rankled.

The captain dealt with such offenders by making them stand at attention on the bridge all night; but this had little effect; it became the fashion.

At such times bad blood is bound to find a vent, and when the maligned athlete of the kid gloves took a seat next to his enemy of the court-martial, the smoking-room looked for trouble. It was not long in coming. What happened nobody seemed to know exactly. It was said that one blew smoke in the other's face, that their elbows had "interfered" in the process of lifting their glasses; certainly no word passed, yet something precipitated them at one another's throats.

The *Borax* was rolling heavily, and for a moment they swayed in each other's embrace, while the smoking-room gathered in an awed circle. Then they crashed to the floor, carrying away a tableful of bottles and glasses. The bar-tender whistled shrilly, and the fifth officer appeared, but by no amount of persuasion or force could the men be separated. Apparently they revelled in rolling amongst broken glass, fighting for a strangle-hold. They were both powerfully built men, but the athlete fought at a disadvantage, knowing only Queensberry rules. The other used any means that came into his evil head to gain the mastery; he kicked, gauged, bit.

By this time the smoking-room was a mass of swaying, shouting sympathisers, of the type who delight in sitting at a ring-side in comfort to watch others receiving punishment.



The Nut and Freckles at Liver Drill

"Let 'em 'ave it out!"

"Leave 'em alone!"

"'It 'im, Ted!"

The chaplain, in pyjamas and a dressing-gown, pluckily seized the athlete about the waist, but was flicked aside like a straw and the two men scrambled to their feet, panting, and glaring at one another like wild beasts.

At this point the captain appeared and, to everyone's surprise, agreed to let the two men fight it out. Now this was the very last thing the gentleman of the court-martial desired. He had already experienced enough to know that a fair fight would mean his annihilation. He sank on to one knee to ponder the matter.

"Get up!" roared the athlete.

In his excitement the other's English almost deserted him.

"'E vill murter me," he panted.

One could not help feeling sorry for him. But any sympathy he might have gained by his abject condition must have been instantly dispersed when he suddenly seized a broken bottle from the floor and, springing to his feet, made to thrust it into his adversary's face. The bottle was wrenched from his grasp before he could carry out his intention, but no one could prevent him from taking a flying leap at his enemy, seizing him about the waist, and fastening his teeth in the other's chest. He literally took a mouthful . . . but there is no need to complete details. They

were separated, and for the next few days two dour men paced the deck of the *Borax*, feigning to be unaware of each other's existence.

Only three days more! But now there was no dress rehearsal; the actual performance was due. The frills and furbelows of ordinary shore-going were dispensed with, and the "domestics" assumed the garb in which they intended to enter service. Whatever loss this party of a hundred and fifty girls was to England, it can safely be said that it was Australia's gain, for a healthier, better set-up influx into any country it would be hard to imagine.

At six o'clock on a gorgeous morning of sunrise and opal mist the *Borax*, in all stages of deshabille, welcomed land—a mere hint, like a low-lying cloud on the far horizon, yet enough to disperse the boredom of the last three weeks as though by magic. People awoke as from a trance; unexpected smiles and cheerful remarks were exchanged on all sides; Australia was in sight!

Some wept. He is a wise man who can account for women's tears, but in three instances among the "domestics" the indefatigable Freckles discovered the cause. Was it because the sight of land reminded them of home and friends? Because they dreaded the unknown quantity of service in strange surroundings? Because of joy at sight of their goal? No—simply because they were leaving the *Borax*. They had literally had

the time of their lives during the past seven weeks, that was all. So much for an emigrant ship from the emigrant's point of view.

The Nut packed suit-cases cluttered with useless, silver-stoppered bottles, and strolled the deck with a malacca cane.

The Spinster sat in her deck-chair, serene in the knowledge that her cabin trunk was neatly filled with every necessity dear to her detailed mind.

Freckles threw clothing into a kit-bag and trod on it.

The Firm did not weep.

III

THE "WANDERLUST"

THE Australian ports have been too often described to call for mention here. A well-known traveller has labelled them Adelaide for culture, Melbourne for business, Sydney for pleasure; and he was not far out in his estimate. For the rest, they are clean, sun-bathed, optimistic cities, each convinced that it is the only one in the Commonwealth worthy of the name.

The Spinster, of an almost painfully detailed and practical turn of mind, was rather disappointed in Adelaide, partly because it failed to supply her with a particular brand of shoe-tree she desired, and partly because the alleged "culture" was not sufficiently in evidence. She seemed to imagine it should have been found neatly stacked on either side of the streets; then, too, after the long ship-board confinement her feet were soon weary from trudging pavements. On such slight foundation the first, and usually lasting, impressions of a city depends. Melbourne chilled the Firm to the marrow. This symmetrical city—laid out in blocks, American fashion—seems to alternatively swelter under a 110° in the shade Northerly Buster from the sun-

baked desert inland, or shiver before an icy blast direct from the South Pole. Perhaps this accounts for the extraordinary phenomenon of Melbourne feminine fashion parading the streets in print dresses and furs!

Sydney was welcome. The Firm revelled in the stately passage through the Heads and up the harbour fairway, with its clear blue water and slow-moving panorama of green hill-sides and red-tiled houses.

It was two years since Freckles had visited the "Ma" State, as Australians call New South Wales, and as he led the way to a modest but central hotel in Pitt Street, noting cherished landmarks and longing with almost a native's pride of citizenship for a sign of appreciation on the part of his companions, it seemed that it might have been two weeks for all the difference discernible in his surroundings. Here, however, he soon realised that he was wrong. There *was* a difference, vague, yet insistent.

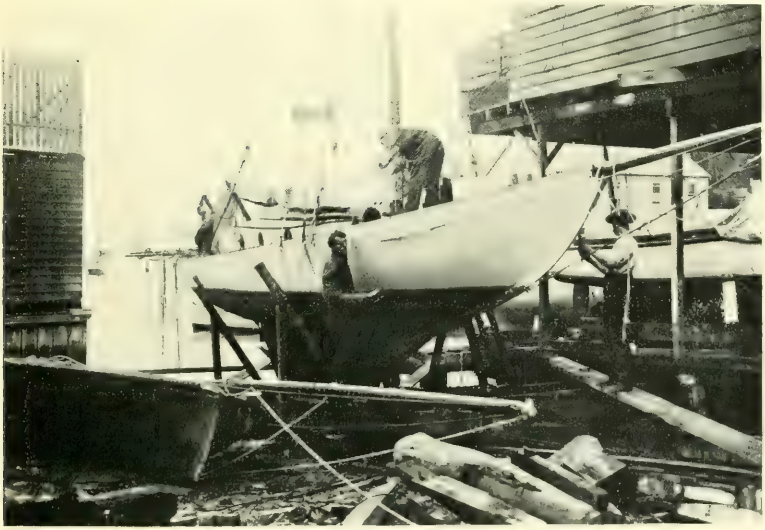
In the evening, when the Firm had been safely installed at the hotel, he sought the streets for enlightenment, and there, as is usually the case when searching for a national characteristic, he found it. Towards him, along George Street, came a man and a woman. In this there was nothing extraordinary, considering that at six o'clock in the evening George Street, Sydney, is rather more crowded than Oxford Street, London; but in this particular couple happened to lie the

solution of Freckles' problem. They spake not yet their jaws moved tirelessly with the methodical, rotary motion of a cow chewing the cud. The only difference being that the cow usually keeps her mouth shut during the operation, and these, her human prototypes, did not.

Apart from her pallid face, too obviously coated with cosmetics, her gold teeth and general "smartness" of appearance, the lady called for little attention; but the man—he wore a jacket heavily padded at the shoulders and falling sheer to his knees with the creaselessness of plate armour, trousers emphatically peg-top, and boots of a shape and colour that baffled description. His hair hung in a greasy, semicircular wad over his collar, and his neck, from constant shaving, had assumed the blue tint peculiar to dark men. For the rest, he wore a minute felt hat, perched at an angle, and two golden teeth set with some indistinguishable gem.

And there were others—many others—of varying degrees of similarity to this type parading George Street that evening, and Freckles watched and thought—but wondered no longer. Australia was becoming Americanised. Later, in conversation with old friends—residents—he found that this was so in other and more vital respects than personal appearance. Trusts and Combines are creeping into the country; its business methods are becoming astute rather than trustworthy; its politics more and more commercial. In her

The Firm



The *Wanderlust*

art, her sport, her very home life, Australia's tendency at the present time is all towards America. And if she prefers foreign methods to those of her forbears, who shall gainsay her? Time and her ultimate place amongst the nations alone can prove the wisdom of her choice.

It is as well that with all the innovations inseparable from present-day "progress," Australia still retains her sun-born heritage of good-natured, happy-go-lucky independence. This sterling characteristic is manifest in her cabmen, railway porters, and even restaurant waiters. They expect no tip and are therefore under no obligation.

Again, in the large Sydney stores one is still waited upon by the abnormally developed little girl who would be at school in any other country. As a matter of fact the customer does the waiting, while this young lady straightens her waistband, prinks her hair, or passes the time of day with her neighbour. And no one appears to mind—except the finnicky, old-world visitor—and he or she receives studied inattention.

As an instance of the Antipodean outlook on life, the following incident is perhaps worth mentioning. The Nut was retiring to rest at the modest but central hotel, and after the usual rites laid him gently down on his snowy white bed, whereupon he crashed to the floor in an avalanche of mattress, sheets and mosquito nets. The thing had collapsed. An Australian would have sworn vigorously, then laughed, and replaced the wire

mattress more securely on its iron frame-work. Not so the Nut. Donning his blue-flowered bath robe, he sought the proprietress, an ample, motherly soul, in her little office on the first floor.

"My bed," he announced, with an air of praiseworthy restraint, "has given way."

"Never!" promptly beamed the proprietress. "We charge extra for that."

The Nut has never forgotten it. He still conjures up visions of what would happen "at home" under like circumstances—hurrying men-servants, profuse apologies. . . .

"'Pon my Sam," he confided when the first shock of the incident had worn off, "I'm not sure that I don't like it!"

"Democracy growing on you," suggested Freckles.

"Um—ah, we'll see," pondered the Nut.

The next morning calamity descended upon the Firm.

"Has anyone been troubled during the night?" drawled the Nut at breakfast.

The Spinster looked up and their eyes met over the sugar basin.

"I'm so glad you mentioned it," she said. "I was afraid I was the only one."

"Nimble little beggars," pursued the Nut, helping himself to a second peach. "I chased one with a tumbler till it ran to ground. Rather pretty, too, in their own quaint way."

"Don't, please," said the Spinster. "I've

heard of them, but never seen one before. Ugh! I wonder if we can make the proprietress believe——"

"Seeing is believing," quoted the Nut. "I caught one in the end and it still struggles for life in a watery grave."

There was no need to convince the genial proprietress; she was perfectly willing to admit that her hotel was alive, and many, many another in Sydney. "People brought them in their luggage." She was sorry, because she had rather taken a fancy to the Firm, but if it felt it must go, go it must. Good-bye, and better luck next time!

No purpose can be served in shutting one's eyes to a public scourge, and bugs—BUGS, not fleas—are amongst the worst of these. They thrive in dirt and old woodwork, especially in warm, dry climates, and for any house infested with them there are only two courses open—either to immerse it in kerosene or burn it to the ground.

The problem now confronting the Firm was to discover a hotel, no matter how expensive or out of the way, provided it was clean. This by superhuman endeavour they succeeded in doing, and after the Nut had carefully examined the cracks in the front steps with his cane, to the vast entertainment of the hall porter, the Firm settled down in luxury to eradicate the effects of immigrant ship diet.

The next morning a resplendent motor car, flashing red in the sunlight, drew up at the hotel

steps, and the entire "lounge" craned its neck in expectation of the arrival or departure of a celebrity. The Nut looked uncomfortable.

"Thought we might have a spin into the country," he observed lamely.

The Spinster and Freckles turned upon him a withering glance.

"Is that car yours?" demanded Freckles.

"Wouldn't have it as a gift," replied the Nut; "but I engaged it, yes. Won't you come?"

"No, we won't," was the simultaneous answer.

"Oh, I say." The Nut looked genuinely troubled. "Why not?"

"Send that car away and I'll tell you," said Freckles.

The deed was done and the Firm retired to hold a Board meeting.

"Look here," began Freckles, "we came to Australia with the idea of seeing the Islands on one hundred and fifty pounds, not to tour the environs of Sydney in a motor car. How much money have you got left?"

"One hundred pounds," answered the Nut, with a touch of pride.

"I have one hundred and twenty pounds," piped the Spinster. "How do you account for that?"

The Nut hung his head.

"Cigarettes," he confessed. "They cost like the mischief out here."

"Why not a pipe?"

"I hate them—bubble into them, smell of 'em —but—all right, I'll try."

"And now to business," resumed Freckles. "The programme, as far as I can see, is: Sydney, Fiji and back; Sydney, New Hebrides and back; Sydney, Tahiti and back."

"I don't like all those 'and backs,'" objected the Nut.

"How are they to be got over? There's no communication between the groups, except by Trader, and we may have to wait months for that."

The Nut studied his cigarette end with furrowed brow.

"I've been thinking," he said. "I know you'll jump on me, but—why not our own boat?"

The bolt was loosed and the Nut watched its devastating flight through an obliterating cloud of tobacco smoke.

The Spinster was the first to break the silence.

"Are you trying to be funny?" she asked mildly.

"Not in the least," responded the Nut, leaning forward with diabolical earnestness. "I saw one advertised in yesterday's paper for one hundred and fifty pounds; that's fifty each. Think what it means. We can go where we like and when we like, see double as much as we could on a steamer at less expense, and probably sell the boat down in the Islands for a good deal more than we gave for it. How now?"

It was the thin edge of the wedge, and the entire Firm knew it, yet try as they would neither the Spinster nor Freckles could pluck it out of their minds.

The Islands *in our own boat.* The whole aspect of the trip was lifted on the instant out of the commonplace and set on a pinnacle of romance, by the simple process of a brain-wave on the part of the Nut.

The Islands *in our own boat.* To the Spinster it meant adventure; to Freckles, the realisation of a seven years' dream. For the rest of the day the Firm was strangely silent.

At breakfast the next morning there was a pile of letters beside the Nut's plate, addressed to "T. N." The Spinster and Freckles exchanged glances, but said nothing. The Nut entered late, as usual, and, disdaining the letters, gave his undivided attention to porridge and cream. It was cruel. Presently, however, he condescended to open them one by one, but his expression was mask-like until the last was laid face downwards on the table. Then he smiled and passed one to Freckles.

"How's that for an answer to an advertisement for a boat?" he said.

Freckles read aloud:

"I have good lodgings for gents, washing and mending included. One pound a week."

Everyone laughed rather more heartily than the

occasion demanded ; in short, the ice was broken, and the Firm fell in with a splash. An answer from a ship broker was selected and his office visited.

"I think I have the very craft," this fascinating individual told the Firm. "Would you care to inspect this afternoon ?"

The Firm *did* care, and at the appointed hour journeyed to Rushcutter's Bay and swarmed over a neat little yacht in a state of severely suppressed delirium.

The Spinster seemed particularly pleased with the brass port-holes and the minute electric bulbs, with their plum-coloured silk coverings. The Nut gave his attention to the engine—a 6 h.p. 2 cycle—pronouncing it entirely satisfactory, while Freckles studied the rigging and wondered if he would ever master its intricacies.

"There she is," lured the broker, "forty feet long by nine feet six inches beam, complete in every detail and going for two hundred pounds. I can say no more."

But he *did* say more. And to such purpose that after a whispered conference in the cabin the Firm's mind was made up.

"I think she'll do," drawled the Nut, "when she's been properly examined."

"Properly examined!" The broker looked pained. "But you can see for yourself——"

"Yes; but we know nothing about it—nothing whatever," pursued the Nut, with an apologetic

smile, "so of course we must have her on the slips and get a marine surveyor, mustn't we?"

The broker looked still more pained. The rest of the Firm listened and marvelled. "Slips"—"marine surveyors." Whence this store of knowledge? The Nut was displaying an unexpected turn for business, and they were content to leave matters in his hands.

"And who pays for the slipping?" This from the troubled broker.

"If we buy her, *you* do," said the Nut. "If we don't, *we* do."

And there, perforce, the matter was left until the following afternoon, when a taxi conveyed the Firm and a marine surveyor of renown to Rushcutter's Bay.

"Umph!" grunted the latter, sinking his pen-knife into two inches of punk, and again, "Umph!"

By the expression of the broker's face it was as though the blade had entered his heart. Then the garboard-streak seam was laid bare, she was half filled with water, and the marine surveyor grunted again as a thin silvery trickle descended her keel.

After twenty minutes' inspection it seemed to the Firm that it had narrowly escaped a bad bargain, so that when in passing the surveyor whispered to Freckles, "Snap her up," it came as something of a surprise. "If you don't, I shall," he added a little later, and this clinched

the matter. The Firm beamed, the surveyor beamed, and the broker literally effervesced.

"What shall we call it?" piped the Spinster.

"Her, you mean," corrected the Nut.

"The *Wanderlust*," supplied Freckles, obeying an impulse of his seven years' dream; and when five providential bottles of beer were found in one of the cabin lockers, the little craft was christened there and then.

On the way back to town, free from the broker's embarrassing presence, Freckles sought enlightenment.

"But she was rotten," he protested. "Your knife sank into her as though she was putty."

The marine surveyor of renown chuckled.

"Doesn't do to say too much," he said. "You've got a bargain there; she's cedar. I don't believe the broker knew that. She needs bracing a bit, but——"

During the days that followed the Firm walked the streets of Sydney on air.

"I want," said the Spinster, indicating the passing throng, "I want to walk up to each one of these uninteresting-looking people, slap my chest, and say, 'I'm an "owner."' Don't you?"

The next difficulty was to find a competent master mariner. Sydney's sailor town abounds with maritime out-of-works, but to engage any man with a master's certificate is courting disaster. There are masters *and* masters.

The Firm was naturally on the look-out for a

young man who would enter into the spirit of their projected adventure, and in the Skipper they at last found him. He was a typical, slow-moving, happy-go-lucky Australian, with a prematurely wrinkled brow and a ready smile, usually half hidden behind a gnarled hand. While displaying his certificates he told the Firm that he had left the sea to settle down and clear ten acres of fruit land a few hundred miles out of Sydney. But most of the ten acres still remained to be cleared. He found he was not sufficiently wedded to the Bush, and when deep water and various other voices called he found it necessary for his peace of mind to obey.

He was engaged on the spot, and left the hotel with his first month's wages in advance, and an agreement whereby he was to navigate the yacht *Wanderlust* throughout the South Pacific, at the discretion of her owners, for a term of six months.

"Do you mind telling me," said the Nut when he had taken his leave, "what is to prevent our master mariner harking back to his ten uncleared acres with our good money in his pocket?"

"Nothing," said Freckles, "except——"

"Everything," snapped the Spinster. "He's too nice. His under-lip trembled while he was talking to us. I like nervous men."

The Nut bowed his head.

"That settles it," he murmured.

IV

THE BEST LAID SCHEMES

THERE followed whirlwind days of schemings and purchasings. The Firm placed itself in the hands of its Skipper, and was led like a wandering child through undreamed-of haunts in Sydney's sailor town, where, at moderate or extortionate expense, according to the personal appearance of the customer, such articles as are necessary to *Wanderlusts* on ocean voyages may be purchased.

To the uninitiated it may sound a simple affair to provision and fit a six-ton yacht for the open sea, but for such there is surprise upon surprise in store. Chronometer, barometer, sextant, log, charts, compass, parallel rulers, dividers—each one of these necessities for deep-sea navigation opened up a new vista of learning to the Firm, and for the next week and many weeks and months to follow they rivalled a child at its worst stage of inquisitiveness.

The mariner will smile, but there are others to whom navigation is merely a word, and not a particularly interesting one either. Perhaps these last will bear with the Firm's gropings after maritime knowledge.

Provisioning was soon dispensed with by laying

in two months' allowance of usual ship's provender, but "trade" goods were another matter. Where was the sense, as the Skipper naïvely put it, in paying good hard cash down in the Islands for commodities that can be purchased from the bland kanaka for a tin whistle or a packet of fish-hooks? And so the Firm was conducted to the warehouse of a highly respected merchant who dealt exclusively in gross lots of Jew's harps, burning-glasses, brass rings (engagement and wedding set out in American-cloth boxes and inferior velvet), belts and pouches of a substance resembling glossy brown paper, fish-hooks, butchers' knives, and as a *pièce de résistance* watches—these last cost one and sixpence each and actually ticked when wound.

There are well-known firms in Sydney which pay handsome dividends on the sale of nothing but this execrable trash known as Island "trade," and there is a delicate humour in having the merits of a Jew's harp or tin whistle upheld with all gravity by a dignified partner in black. Freckles entered into the situation with zest, and held long and heated discussions on each absurd article.

In a week all was in readiness. The *Wanderlust* rode at anchor in Rushcutter's Bay, crammed to her last inch with the variegated fruits of the Firm's labour, and her proud owners gave and received farewell entertainment, with the air of modest heroes.

Everyone seemed immensely impressed with

the daring of the enterprise, but while they drank to its success there was a look in their eyes, a hint in their manner, of one who would like to say "Fools!"

In time this attitude became so marked that open sympathy was extended to the Spinster. Sympathy where envy was due! It was insufferable, and the lady said as much.

"There's not a spark of romance amongst the lot of them," she declared, with heat.

"Why take any notice of them?" consoled Freckles. "Their minds are about as wide as a split hair."

For the first time, however, the Firm began to think seriously of the project it had undertaken. Was it heroic—and therefore foolish—to try and reach the Islands in a six-ton yacht? Evidently, or everyone would not be at such pains to point out that it was.

"Most daring of you," gushed a lady friend. "You *deserve* to enjoy it, though, really—but there, you know what amuses you, of course. Good-bye. I do *hope* we shall see you safely back!"

"Look here"—this from the button-holing type of critic in a confidential undertone—"it may be all right for you fellows, but—a woman—it isn't *right*!"

"You can have it from me!"—here spake the man of experience—"you *may* get there and you may not, but whichever you do you'll have a

hell of a time. I remember when we tried to make Brisbane—Brisbane, mind you—in my twenty-tonner——"

Under the influence of these would-be detractors the Firm became more thoughtful, but none the less determined.

About this time the ubiquitous newspaper reporter put in an appearance. Returning to the hotel one evening, Freckles found the Spinster in earnest conversation with a kindly looking, white-haired lady.

"*The Clarion,*" she announced, when the latter had taken her leave of the easiest prey she had probably ever encountered. "My first interview!"

"What did you tell her?" asked Freckles suspiciously.

"Oh, everything."

"Everything?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Well, it doesn't do to be too easy with these gentry; they——"

"They what?"

"Distort."

"But what is there to distort? Besides, I am sure *she* won't; she was such a nice, jolly woman."

"Dentists are sometimes nice, jolly men," said Freckles profoundly. "Wait and see."

And the Spinster waited and saw—half-a-column under the bold headline, "Lady's Venturesome Voyage," setting forth in quasi-humorous

vein every possible and impossible detail of the proposed trip, including an intimate inventory of the Spinster's all-too-scanty "trousseau."

"I never said that," she protested, with flaming cheeks, at breakfast next morning, "or that—or that. The old——"

"Journalist!" supplied Freckles.

Two days before sailing the Nut was visited by another brain-wave, the outcome of a visit to a picture palace. At a ridiculously early hour for him, he invaded Freckles' bedroom in a state of suppressed excitement and his favourite dressing-gown.

"I've been thinking," he announced.

"Hush!" breathed Freckles.

"Yes. Why not a cinematograph camera?"

Freckles turned his face to the wall.

"Why not a cinematograph camera?" came the insistent drawl.

He was sitting on the bed now, puffing furiously at a cigarette that smelt like a burning chemist's shop.

"There ought to be something for a cinema down in the Islands. I've never seen any decent pictures of them, have you?" Pause, and more nauseating tobacco smoke. "Why not?"

Freckles jerked himself into a sitting position.

"Do you really want to know?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Well, money, money, money! A proper outfit would cost at least one hundred pounds, and—

er—don't talk about it; it's a thing I've been wanting to do as much as anything."

"Really, now," mused the Nut, "we must think this out. I rather fancy myself on a lecturing tour—'The Voyage of the *Wanderlust*,' complete with claw-hammer coat, electric-bulbed pointer, and the vicar's daughters in the front row of a crowded house, what? We must think about it."

The result was inevitable. Only another seeming impossibility was rendered practicable by the all-conquering logic of the Nut. The camera was hired for ten pounds for six months and films bought at twopence per foot; it only remained to learn how to operate. Sydney's Botanical Gardens was the scene of the struggle, and for two days the Firm staggered rampant round gravelled paths, turning a handle on every unsuspecting subject to hand. Two thirsty ladies at a drinking-fountain fled giggling before the approaching nuisance. A stately policeman descending a flight of ornamental steps was immortalised in the act of ordering the Firm to move on. The astonishing fact remains, however, that at the end of the second day the task was accomplished, and the Firm had the satisfaction of seeing its efforts reproduced on a screen. They were excellent; which only proves that, like many another problem in life, the cinematograph camera is a grossly deceiving affair. The amateur photographer approaches it with awe, anticipating

baffling intricacies, only to discover that a cinema is rather easier to manipulate than an ordinary camera. When three or four fundamental principles have been laid to heart, the rest consists in finding a subject, ingenuity in its stage management, and sturdy muscles for porterage. Of course these remarks apply solely to the "taking" of pictures and not to developing, printing and projection.

At last the great day arrived, and in a taxi piled high with heterogeneous belongings the Firm took leave of its expensive but insectless hotel and were escorted to the scene of departure by a bevy of "seers-off."

At the last moment it struck the Nut that he had not made a will, and for the next few minutes proceedings were held in a state of suspension while he sat on a case of benzine disposing of his property with a fountain pen. It was an impressive sight.

And so amidst waving handkerchief, coo-ees, snapping camera shutter and whirling cinematograph handle, the *Wanderlust* chugged on her auxiliary into the harbour fairway and—out to the open sea? No. A dark scheme of the Skipper's was carried into execution, and presently anchoring in a secluded bay, the Firm set to work stowing away and getting ship-shape, safe from the prying eye and other interruptions of well-meaning friends. It was sly, but necessary.

They worked without cessation until midnight,

and slept till dawn, but when the engine was called upon it was discovered that a stray sheet had become entangled in the propeller. For two mortal hours this refractory rope-end was cajoled, cursed, tugged and slackened without effect. To make matters worse, the secluded beach belied itself, and a gaping crowd appeared from nowhere.

"That's them," one could hear, "the *Wanderlust*. They're off to the Islands. See it in the papers?"

The sunlight laughed, a wretched vase of flowers presented to the Spinster, and now gracing the cabin roof, laughed, breeding in Freckles a fierce desire to kick it into the sea. The yacht *Wanderlust* on a "Venturesome Voyage," recipient of a column in three of Sydney's leading dailies, held up by a rope-end! Confusion! Ignominy!

Freckles rowed ashore in the dinghy, murmured "engine trouble" to the inquiring throng, and persuaded a sun-baked son of the surf to come off and see what he could do. He dived and came up, shivering and unsuccessful. It was bitterly cold, and there were sharks, but a stiff nip of whisky caused him to forget such details for the time being. Again he dived, and rose purple and babbling. After each immersion and revivification he became more purple and more loquacious, until in sheer desperation the Firm supplied him with a knife. "The rest will wear off," said the Skipper. At long last, and by some lucky

The Skipper's "Trick"

Mid Ocean: the Spinster VI the tiller while the Skipper "shoots" the sun

chance, the rope was cut, the son of the surf conveyed ashore—still purple, still babbling—and the *Wanderlust* headed for the open sea, passing Sydney Heads with all sails set on the 8th of June.

All that golden afternoon the *Wanderlust* slipped east-north-east, and her crew settled down to business with becoming gravity.

The Spinster donned knickers, or rather discarded her skirt. The Nut rolled up the sleeves of a taffeta shirt, exposing a well-tattooed forearm, and Freckles gazed aft, lost in the realisation of his dream—"yachting in the South Pacific."

Presently night and a breathless calm descended on the *Wanderlust*, and the Nut, being the only one of the ship's company with the vaguest knowledge of engines, was called upon to start the auxiliary. It refused. The Nut met this setback with fortitude, struggling with greasy hands and clothes, perspiring forehead and aching arms for upwards of an hour, while the *Wanderlust* rode at will on an oily swell and the South Head Light winked knowingly. Thereafter human nature asserted itself and he descended rapidly from a stoicism, through the varying stages of annoyance and exasperation, to sheer blasphemy. Frightful oaths, mingled with the impotent chuggings of the engine, ascended from the cabin to the anxious listeners on deck, while now and then a face, distorted and besmeared, was lifted to the stars in mute appeal.

The rest of the ship's company waited and hoped. They longed to laugh, to offer sympathy and help, but something in the Nut's gleaming eye bade them forbear. A man—be he ne'er so even-tempered under ordinary circumstances—is best left alone when dealing with a refractory oil-engine.

The end came very quietly. Methodically replacing the companion steps, he climbed into the cockpit and lit a cigarette.

"It simply defeats me," he said calmly. "Anyone else care to try?"

The Skipper accepted the challenge, and for a further hour there were vain strivings and feeble chuggings in the cabin, while a shoal of porpoises surrounded the helpless *Wanderlust*, tumbling like marine clowns in the moonlight.

"I cannot understand," mused the Nut, after a prolonged and refreshing silence, "why marine engines have to be so much less reliable than a motor's. Now, with my car——" And he relapsed into reminiscence and countless cigarettes.

But the why and wherefore of marine engine trouble must be left to those who *think* they understand such matters; suffice it that for the rest of the night the *Wanderlust's* 6 h.p. 2 cycle auxiliary refused point-blank.

Wearied from the strain—mental and physical—the Firm hung a hurricane lantern in the rigging and retired to rest, while the *Wanderlust* still drifted, the porpoises played, and the South Head Light winked knowingly.

A few hours later the Spinster, having occasion to put her feet to the floor, gave a squeak of astonishment as they splashed into three inches of cold water. Investigation brought to light the grisly fact that the *Wanderlust* leaked. "Weeping a bit," the Skipper called it, "after drying out on the slips."

It sounded comforting; perhaps that was why he said it, for the next six hours were a nightmare of darkness, greasy water and aching limbs. In turns the Firm swayed, straddled over the bilge, bailing, bailing, from a tin dipper to a pail, from the pail back to parent ocean, a constant stream of oily water.

At dawn a breeze sprang up from the north'd, and the *Wanderlust* responded by "weeping" still more copiously. However, by constant bailing, and with the help of the pump, which the Skipper had at last induced to work, the water was kept level with the floor-boards and a respite was snatched for a hasty conference in the cabin.

It was a depressed and chastened Firm that gathered round the tiny table under the hurricane lantern and discussed the situation, with water swirling about their feet.

"She weeps," quoted Freckles.

"We had better turn back," said the Nut.

"Unlucky," grunted the Skipper.

"I think it is the most sensible thing to do," offered the Spinster.

And so it was decided; sail was set, and the *Wanderlust*, under mainsail and jib, beat her way up the New South Wales coast.

It was found that she had drifted at least fifteen miles in the night, and against a head wind she crept past Botany Bay (the original convict settlement of Australia) to the Heads, which she entered at four o'clock in the afternoon—with the Firm still bailing!

It was Sunday, and all Sydney was on the harbour, yachting, launching and rowing.

"Lord!" breathed Freckles, as a pleasure launch, crowded with craning necks and smiling faces, passed within a few yards.

"That's them," came the now familiar salutation. "Hi! *Wanderlust*, thought you were off to the Islands?"

The Firm bowed its head as before a crushing blow, and the *Wanderlust* crept on her ignominious way.

"Others have had to put back twice, three times!" ventured Freckles. "Look at Jack London." But no one "looked!"

"Why not paint out our name?" suggested the Nut. "Couldn't we hang the frying-pan over it or something? Damn!" he exploded, as a fascinating apparition in pink waved from the deck of a yacht.

"Tow us in," commanded the Skipper, as the solitary occupant of a disreputable oil-launch steered alongside.

"Engine trouble?" he inquired, with an apish grin.

The Nut made a noise in his throat and retreated to the cabin.

"Tow us in," repeated the Skipper, with set lips, and a few moments later the *Wanderlust* was making fair headway towards the boatyard, arm in arm with an evil-smelling coracle.

Such a return, to the very landing-stage where, twenty-four hours before, she had taken her leave with all the pomp and circumstance of a deep-sea departure!

V

A LESSON IN PATIENCE—AND OTHER VIRTUES

THERE are deeps below deeps of boarding-house accommodation in Sydney, but at Wondilla the Firm must have surely sounded bottom. The house was unspeakably dirty, the rooms as depressing as tombs, and the food far worse than that of any emigrant ship. Yet here the Firm stayed, for three very excellent reasons. It was close to the yard where the *Wanderlust* was undergoing repairs, it was cheap, and it was out of the way. As may be imagined, at this time the "venturesome voyagers" desired nothing more earnestly than seclusion.

Punctually at 7.30—to the lasting annoyance of the Nut—they descended a flight of crazy stairs and, taking their seats at a table decorated with paper flowers, wrestled with leathern steak or charred chop, under a silent fire of furtive glances from their fellow-diners. These consisted of a flashily dressed costumier from one of Sydney's largest stores, two Cockney fresh fruit agents, a musician from the "orchestra" of a local picture palace, who persisted in wearing long hair and a faded velvet jacket, and a youth whose chief occupation seemed to consist

in gazing over the harbour and picking his teeth.

Fierce verbal warfare raged between the musician and the Cockneys, principally on the vexed question of native land.

"If you don't like it," stormed the infuriated musician one morning at breakfast, "why don't yer get back to yer fog-land? We don't want you, my oath!"

This, it may be remarked, is the invariable and very sound argument employed by all colonials when dealing with a refractory Britisher. But this particular musician had reckoned without the Cockney.

"I'll tell yer," grinned the latter, with an enormous forkful of steak and potatoes suspended before his mouth, "we comes hout to holes like this to maike lucre—filthy lucre—but we takes precious good care to get back to Gawd's country to spend it. I'm gettin' to love yer more every day, mate." This last remark, though possibly irrelevant, invariably drove the musician from the table.

And yet there are Britishers who wonder why they are disliked in the Colonies.

After breakfast the Firm descended a flight of stone steps to the harbour side and worried the already harassed proprietor of the building yard. When would the *Wanderlust* be ready?

With sawdust in his hair and a forced smile on

his lips, the shipbuilder's answer was invariably the same:

"Just a few days now."

How he must have loathed the sight of every member of the Firm.

"And what was the matter with her?"

Here again the answer was inevitable.

"Weepin' a bit, but we'll get her right."

At the end of a week he was less optimistic.

"There's only one thing to be done with her," he informed Freckles, jerking his thumb at the *Wanderlust.* "She must be stripped—stripped and caulked and recoppered."

Very well, the Firm was willing to do anything —anything to get away.

In the course of time the *Wanderlust was* stripped, and caulked, and recoppered—but still wept.

The shipbuilder scratched his sawdust-coated hair and smiled his forced smile, but his eyes told the truth. He had no notion where or why the boat leaked; moreover, he heartily wished her at the bottom of the sea. He even went so far as to speak a little of his mind.

"You've got the wrong type of boat there," he told the now thoroughly depressed Firm. "She's got too much overhang. Whoever heard of going to sea—sea, mind you—with a counter like that it would snap like matchboard in any weather." Then her bows were "fin," her mast wanted shortening four feet, the hull needed strengthen-

ing with natural wood elbows every six inches from stem to stern. . . .

Metaphorically the Firm threw up its hands and said: "Very well, get along with it, but end this tyranny of tears."

The engine was still more aggravating. In all, five alleged engineers tinkered more or less unsuccessfully with the *Wanderlust's* auxiliary. Each blamed the handiwork of his predecessor, set the machinery in motion for three minutes, and charged two guineas. One could sympathise with the agonised cry of the Nut:

"Does anyone—anyone in Australia understand marine engines?"

It was during these parlous days that the Firm came into contact with Australian labour conditions, and its sympathy goes out to anyone who is obliged to suffer the Australian working man on his native heath. In temperament he is a child, irresponsible, indolent, and as a child he must be treated. His work is nothing to him beyond what it realises in hard cash. Already he receives far more than his poor workmanship warrants, yet still he strikes and strikes again, unmindful of the fact that in so doing he is impoverishing the source of his income, increasing his cost of living and retarding the progress of his native land. No young country has yet been opened up by the wage-earner, and as far as genuine development is concerned, at the present time Australia is at a standstill.

The latest terror for the immigrant lies in the Unions. Time was when he joined his particular body and worked harder and better than his associates for the same wage—until contaminated —but now it is no easy task for an immigrant to join a Union. They will have none of these imported competents swelling the wage-lists and showing up their own inefficiency. And the employer? He knows that it is as much as his life is worth to engage a non-Union man.

It is an uncharitable thought, but one is tempted to believe that Australia would be the better for another drought, with its drastic but implacable power to reduce conditions to a true and normal level.

Week after week slipped by and the *Wanderlust* still "wept." On more than one occasion the Firm came within an ace of discovery by their friends. They had crept like thieves in the night to a picture palace in Sydney, where they hoped to pick up a few wrinkles on "topicals," and had taken their seats on the returning ferry when the familiar face of one of the "seers-off" disengaged itself from the crowd and its owner walked with strange deliberation towards them. The entire Firm raised its arm as though warding off a blow, until Freckles and the Nut realised in a simultaneous flash that the enemy had been dining—dining well. He saw them not, and would no doubt have passed by, still absorbed in the conduct of his feet, but for the Spinster. Why it is

that a woman—observant to a degree in most matters—should be so slow in the detection of a "diner" will ever remain a mystery; suffice it that in the present instance the Spinster bowed and beamed, in spite of the rib-shattering nudges she was receiving on either side. The enemy stopped short in his tracks, stared with gaping mouth from one end of the Firm to the other, and, crossing himself devoutly, sat down.

"Glory be!" he gasped, betraying his emotion and nationality in a breath. "The shock you gave me. I thought you'd gone to the bottom, and here you are."

Next morning the Firm watched him through field-glasses ascending a flight of steps to the ferry landing. He looked about him, but the *Wanderlust* was out of range, which probably convinced him that he had been dreaming as well as dining the previous evening. At all events the Firm saw him no more.

Each morning the Firm looked out of its casement window, and, hearing the *Wanderlust* pump at work, descended in *déshabillé* to see what water she had made during the night. And always it was over the floor-boards.

The shipbuilder with the sawdust hair had long since discarded his forced smile.

"She's as good as I can make her," he actually admitted one morning.

"In that case," said Freckles, "we sail to-morrow."

But it was as well that the Nut took it into his head to smoke a contemplative cigarette over the *Wanderlust's* bilge.

"It seems to me," he drawled, "that this water is coming from higher up—look at that!"

He pointed to a trickle descending one of the timbers. The shipbuilder was called, the lining torn out of the ship and the discovery made that every rib of the hull from stem to stern was broken clean through! In any sea, with two tons of lead on the keel pulling her downward, and taut stays straining her upward, the *Wanderlust* would undoubtedly have split in half.

"I told yer," was all the shipbuilder managed to articulate, "I told yer," though what he had "told" no one seemed inclined to inquire.

"She's a coffin-ship all right," supplemented one of the cheerful craftsmen, studying with critical eye his appointed task of reribbing, and no doubt wondering if it were anywhere near his dinner-hour. "Darned lucky you noticed. . . ."

Another week crept by, but at the end of it the *Wanderlust* was practically a new boat. The bill was positively staggering, and the Firm's long-kept pledge of not cabling for money was broken in a good cause. They now "had a *boat*," so said the Skipper, and she sailed from the yards at dawn without so much as a waving handkerchief of farewell, but with the four most thankful souls in Australia aboard.

With glee the Firm watched a sawdusted head

dissolve into the distance, then Wondilla, perched on a cliff-side as an everlasting warning, and sighing a simultaneous sigh of relief, gave their attention to the business in hand.

And it was needed. Outside the Heads something of a sea was running, causing the *Wanderlust* to emulate the antics of a switchback. Laboriously she would climb a roller, poise for an instant on its summit, and pitch head foremost into the trough below.

"She's wet," growled the Skipper, as the jib-boom and half her rakish bows buried themselves in the side of a grey-green mountain. "By cripes, she's wet!"

To three rank land-lubbers it was an awe-inspiring sight, and a still more awe-inspiring sensation. The Skipper was the first to succumb, then the Spinster, but neither allowed themselves the luxury of helplessness; there was too much to be done. Amidst sea-sickness, wind-driven spray and acrobatic lurchings the course was set east-north-east and watches appointed—the "sleepy" twelve o'clock to four for the Skipper, four to eight for the Nut, and eight to twelve for Freckles. The Spinster was allotted the far more irksome task of cooking, which consisted in holding a kettle on a spluttering Primus stove until it boiled, or the flame was extinguished by spray, and washing up in cold salt water. The *Wanderlust* carried a seventy-gallon tank of drinking-water, but care was exercised in its use on the Skipper's

terse recommendation that—" there's no knowing where we shall fetch up."

Out of the dread south-east came rain squalls, and with one of them a staunch little yacht scudding before the wind. A faint " Good luck ! " reached the ears of the Firm before it was lost in wind and rain, and the *Wanderlust* staggered on under mainsail and jib.

Another squall, more severe than the last, and the Skipper shook his head.

" Let her come up," he roared above the din, and slipping and sliding over the lurching deck he took a reef in the mainsail, ably hindered by Freckles, who persisted in tying " granny " knots instead of square. How the Skipper contrived to keep his temper during the first week of the " venturesome voyage " is still a source of wonder and admiration to the Firm.

Towards evening the wind veered to the south-west, and the *Wanderlust* raced before a following sea in a series of gigantic swoops. It was more like ski-ing than anything that can be called to mind. The pause, the start, the acceleration of speed and the ultimate telemark were all there, even to the " toss." The *Wanderlust* was caught like a cork on the crest of each roller and pitched headlong down its side in a flurry of foam and spray. The helmsman, with his back to the tiller and his legs braced against the cockpit walls, strained every muscle to hold the course, but slowly the boat would edge away—away to the

south in its effort to relieve the tension of straining canvas.

Again the mariner will smile in his beard—if he has one, and if he does not laugh outright. No doubt he is thoroughly versed in every phase of the elements, and has at his command technical terms for each lurch of a ship, but it must be remembered—if, indeed, a reminder is necessary—that these veracious notes are written by a landsman for landsmen. Mariners avaunt, or smile if you will, it is a fearsome sight to glance over one's shoulder and see a foam-flecked Pacific roller descending apparently upon one's very head. It causes the breath to catch in the throat, and the helmsman for preference to keep his eye glued to the swaying cardboard of the binnacle.

At night the fearful majesty of it all is increased tenfold. The helmsman, muffled to his ears, and wedged into a corner of the tiny cockpit, sees nothing but his course—E.N.E.—swaying to and fro under the binnacle lights, and below him in the tiny cabin the recumbent forms of three fellow-beings for whom he is responsible. He feels alone, alone and horribly insignificant. Under the cover of darkness his boat—with all her brave display of bellying canvas and forty foot length of deck—has vanished; he is in a cedar shell, three-quarters of an inch thick, with fourteen inches of free-board, perched somewhere on an angry ocean of unknown depth. A full realisation of his situation is almost staggering and he

resolves to think of other things—England, home and beauty, but even as the resolution takes shape, a wave bursts on the counter, jerking him back to the present with the shock of a cold-water douche.

It was Freckles' watch and the wind still increased. The *Wanderlust* now corkscrewed down the mountain-sides and ended her course with a reverberating thump and plunge that shook her like an ill-set jelly. To the helmsman's infinite relief the Skipper's head appeared, then his pyjama-ed body as he clung to the cockpit combing and looked out into the night.

"By cripes!" he roared. The rest was whipped from his lips. But again, presently: "Let her come up, right up."

With fiercely flapping canvas the *Wanderlust* poked her aquiline nose into the wind, while the Skipper, a dim figure in sodden pyjamas, skipped over the wave-washed deck like a monkey, returning from the for'ard hatch with a sea anchor.

This invaluable adjunct to small craft in deep waters demands a word of explanation. To look at it is nothing more than an overgrown canvas jelly-bag, but when heaved over a boat's bows on a few fathoms of stout manila it fills with water, and floating yet submerged, offers sufficient resistance to keep her head on.

It was this simple device that made possible the world voyages in small craft of Captain Slocum and other marine adventurers.

Another excellent method of battling with the elements is to carry canvas bags about the size of a Rugby football. In times of stress these are filled with oil-soaked oakum, the bags well pricked with a needle and suspended over the ship's bows, where they ride at will, slowly oozing oil on the troubled waters.

In the case of the *Wanderlust*, with her cut-away bows and consequent lack of grip, the sea anchor proved too small, and although it steadied her somewhat she rode broadside on until the mizen was set. This had the effect of partially bringing her up to the wind, but it was as well she had two tons of lead on her keel, for otherwise she would most certainly have capsized. As it was, she rode like a heavily weighted float, heeling from side to side at an angle that to any other craft of the same dimensions would have been impossible.

Nothing more could be done for the moment, and the crew disposed themselves in their bunks, wedging themselves in with cushions, sails and anything handy. So two hours passed by, when a mumble from the Skipper made it known that he was about to burst into speech.

"That jolly sea anchor rope'll chafe through," he announced.

The Nut shot him an apprehensive glance, then looked at the clock. It was *his* watch.

"What do we do?" he inquired timidly.

"Wrap sacking round it."

The Nut finished his cigarette in silence, then scrambled to his feet, gripping the table for support against the boat's lurching. The light of determination was in his eye; clearly this was intended for a lesson in self-help—besides, it was *his* watch. The Skipper was within his rights. With clenched teeth, and a grain sack and twine in either hand, he crawled up the companion steps into the cockpit, followed by Freckles. There the two incompetents stood for a space, splashed with spray and pitched from side to side like shuttlecocks.

"I'm going to do it," said the Nut.

"Right," said Freckles.

Together they crept forward on hands and knees into turmoil and darkness. No doubt the Skipper was chuckling under his blankets below; they would show him! A terrific lurch caused them to clutch convulsively at the cabin roof, while a wave passed clean over them. Gasping but undaunted, they crawled on, and reaching the throat and peak halliards clung to them for dear life and awaited opportunity. Somewhere ahead of them was the *Wanderlust's* nose, burying itself at intervals of perhaps six seconds in the mighty rollers; it was necessary then to carry out instructions in the space of six seconds—a rank impossibility. Still, it was the Nut's watch. Suddenly he parted company with the halliards, and for one wild moment Freckles fancied he had gone overboard; but no, something was wriggling

over the deck for'ard. In feverish haste the sacking was wrapped twice, thrice, round the sea anchor's hawser where it chafed the gunwale, and the twine was in the act of being tied when the *Wanderlust* pitched head foremost into a wave. Exactly what occurred in the next few seconds it is impossible to say. To Freckles it seemed that he was half stunned and being dragged through roaring waters at terrific speed. It was not altogether an unpleasant sensation—far preferable to when he burst into air and again faced the mingled elements. He found himself gripping the sea anchor's rope, and, hastily tying the unfinished knot of the sack lashing—" granny " or square mattered not—he wriggled back to the comparative safety of the halliards. There the Nut, who by some miracle had been washed against the lee-stays, awaited him, and together they clutched their way back to the cockpit.

Freckles nodded in answer to the Nut's unspoken question.

" Some sort of a knot," he said.

" Thank God," breathed the Nut. Then in a loud, firm voice, as they stooped to crawl into the cabin: " Wonderfully dry, considering."

So, covered with glory—in their own minds—they crept shivering to bed.

The Skipper uttered no word of praise or blame, but lay on his back with his blankets to his chin and a suspicion of a smile at the corners of his mouth.

Although the *Wanderlust* was now hove-to and stripped of every rag of canvas, she was facing a gale, and her crew soon knew it, apart from the reluctant admission of the Skipper. Whether with her much-abused overhanging counter and fin bows she would stand the buffeting she was receiving, was a matter best left on the lap of the gods. The Firm rolled itself in its blankets and feigned sleep.

Perhaps the most trying feature of a perfect nightmare of sensation was when the *Wanderlust*, lifted on a roller, soared high into the air. Up, up she went, and for a moment hung suspended; then—there was no knowing—either she sank writhing into the ensuing trough, or met it with a crash that set every timber awork and made itself felt in one's very bowels. There was no knowing, only prolonged, infinitely prolonged speculation, that alternately sickened and shocked.

At intervals of three seconds and sometimes less a resounding thud, accompanied by a convulsive shivering of timbers, told that a wave had knocked at the *Wanderlust's* door—and passed on. Would the next take it into its head to enter? Who could say?

"Yachting in the South Pacific," muttered the Nut, and Freckles and the Spinster summoned up a feeble titter.

An instant later, as though to quell any attempt at levity, a wave broke amidships. The *Wanderlust* went down, down, and a torrent of water

forced its way through the cabin door and sliding roof.

The Firm, drenched and thoroughly frightened —though far more afraid of showing it—stared into one another's anxious faces.

"I've swum seven miles," said the Nut, discarding his twentieth half-smoked cigarette, and glancing furtively at his Colt's Automatic. "I'm not going to drown."

"Nor I," said Freckles. "How about you, Spinster?"

"I shall do my thirty strokes," she replied, with a sickly smile.

At that moment a horrible remorse seized on Freckles. *He* had brought these very good people out here to drown; it was his fault—*his fault.*

"Cripes, she's wet!" grunted the Skipper, breaking silence for the first time in half-an-hour.

"Slightly," agreed the Firm, nodding and grinning like a row of water-logged mandarins. Such inanity!

Another, and still another wave beat down the poor little quivering *Wanderlust*; but still she rose. Absurd visions of a certain prize-fight passed before Freckles' mind, when a man had risen five times before receiving the "knock-out." Exactly what would happen! Four insignificant human beings would flounder for a few seconds in the darkness, and the world would roll on. Truly there is nothing like enraged nature to give man a glimpse of himself.

Suddenly the Firm noticed that the Skipper was up and doing. They watched him, fascinated, as he knelt in the water-washed cockpit, wrestling with the pump by the light of a flickering hurricane lantern.

"Cripes!" he exploded a moment later, tumbling down to the cabin like an animated waterfall, "she won't suck."

The new, semi-rotary four-guinea pump had failed! Somewhere in the swirling water he found a screw-driver and returned to the tussle, while the Firm employed its muscle—and, better still, its mind—in bailing with the now familiar dipper and pail.

Soon the pump lay in pieces and the Skipper held aloft in triumph—half-a-match!

"Jammed in one of the clappers," he bellowed, and presently came the welcome sound of sucking water.

But again and again it jammed, and each time some reminder of the shipbuilder's carelessness was extracted from the clappers. The bilge was afloat with shavings, splinters, match-ends and what not, and each in turn was sucked into the pump's mechanism, until the Firm took it in turns to lie flat on the floor, and, with arms immersed to the elbows in greasy water, arrest all flotsam.

Dawn broke at last, or rather a leaden pallor spread over sea and sky. Outside, the scene was one to engrave itself on the mind of any lands-

man. Wind—wind, a turmoil of grey waters, and deep amongst them a cockle-shell, plunging, lurching, staggering. Inside, four miserable human beings huddled together for warmth and chewing chocolate in stony silence. The acme of apprehension was passed; they were resigned to anything, so that when, after another spell on deck, the Skipper informed his crew that "the counter was opening up," the news was received with apparent indifference.

"That's rather a nuisance," said Freckles.

"Most annoying," agreed the Nut.

But it is doubtful if anyone was more upset than the Skipper at his alarm having missed fire.

"Somebody's killed a Chinaman,"[1] he muttered, and rolled himself in his blankets. Thereafter it was necessary for the watches to pump every half-hour.

[1] Australian vernacular for the cause of ill luck.

VI

LAND!

For sixteen hours the gale raged, and the *Wanderlust* was allowed to live; that is all that can be said.

Their first hand-to-hand fight with an "unknown" will remain for ever in the Firm's memory. Bad weather in plenty they had seen before—worse, in all probability—but always from the deck of a more or less substantial steamer, or sound, dry land. The experience was like a sudden, vivid illustration of things vaguely comprehended in the pages of seafaring fiction, and its effect took some time to wear off.

After any crisis there is reaction; nerves strung to snapping-point relax, and so it was that although the sun shone, and a steady breeze raced the *Wanderlust* over a glittering ocean, an atmosphere of depression pervaded her crew. Each member attended to his duties mechanically, while his thoughts travelled back to what he had passed through. The first question that always presents itself to man — the egoist — on such occasions is—How did he comport himself in the hour of stress? To tell the truth the Firm was

a little ashamed of itself. According to accepted standards it should have laughed in face of danger, instead of which it had munched chocolate and felt qualms in the pit of its stomach.

Slowly, however, with sleep and rest, something of their normal cheerfulness returned, and interest was taken in the ship's whereabouts. At seven-thirty in the morning for longitude and noon for latitude, the Skipper "shot" the sun, consulted the log, and descending to the cabin pored over tomes of nautical tables. The result was marked on the chart, with the help of dividers and parallel rulers, and the satisfying knowledge obtained that the gale had carried the *Wanderlust* one hundred miles on her course. Added to this, she had covered one hundred and twenty miles the following day and was now but one hundred and fifty miles from Lord Howe Island.

One hundred and fifty miles at one hundred and twenty miles a day left one day and a fraction. The Nut, used to flashing from John o' Groats to Land's End in a few hours, worked out this comforting problem, but was instantly squashed by the Skipper, who, like a true seaman, seldom allowed himself to look on the bright side of anything. "A *week* and a bit, you mean. How do we know that this breeze will hold ? How do we know——?" But on such occasions the Firm was learning to close its ears as upon a depressing dirge. No doubt he was weary unto death of his crew's stupendous ignorance, but it must be

remarked here that of all masters the average sailor appears to be the least tolerant.

Living, moving and having their being in a space of eight feet by twelve—the actual dimensions of the *Wanderlust's* cabin, including four bunks and a table—it may be imagined how thoroughly four human beings become acquainted with every turn and twist of one another. A man may think he knows his friend, but in hard times finds himself dealing with a comparative stranger. Character, habits, trend of thought stand out in appalling relief, and for this very reason the secret of all good fellowship—tolerance—is more in demand than any other virtue.

There were times when, from sheer juxtaposition, without hope of relief, the Nut could have handed Freckles a straight left, just as there were times when Freckles could have cheerfully kicked the Nut, and still others when the Spinster would have liked to smack them both. But by the steady exercise of mutual restraint any real unpleasantness was avoided, and under the most provocative conditions. In fact it may be said with truth that their individual peculiarities caused the Firm more amusement than anything else.

A triangle is always entertaining, as when the Nut caught the Spinster's eye, while the chronically impatient Freckles wrestled with a refractory locker in search of canned tomatoes; or when the Spinster, by frantic but soundless signals, called

Freckles' attention to the Nut crouching before the looking-glass, studying with speculative eye the ghastly effect of six days' growth of beard. Or when the Nut and Freckles joined in silent convulsions over the Spinster's knickers, which, it may be mentioned, were stockinette, and by the constant strain of bending became daily more voluminous.

There are other matters usually considered too intimate for mention, but which occur to the mind of everyone, and therefore demand attention if the title of these records is to be lived up to.

"How on earth will you manage?" was a question often put to the Firm before sailing. The answer is that they "managed" in precisely the same way as anyone else. Vital necessity soon overcomes embarrassment, and in so doing need never sacrifice modesty.

From rough weather the *Wanderlust* passed through light breezes into a stark calm, and the Nut resumed his tussle with the engine. It refused flatly to oblige. Perhaps the dry battery had run out. The connections were damp, the carburettor floats sodden; perhaps almost anything. Only one thing was certain, that the *Wanderlust* was virtually carrying three hundredweight of scrap iron, to say nothing of six cases of benzine.

Before sailing the Firm had listened with a certain disdain to the true story of a short-tempered man who, on finding that his oil-engine

failed him on every important occasion, vented his spleen by methodically and with infinite pains sledge-hammering it to smithereens, melting down the remains, and hanging the congealed block of iron over his doorway in token of contempt. The Firm could now sympathise. For a whole day the *Wanderlust* lay helpless, with idly flashing sail and creaking boom on an oily sea, while her crew alternately anathematised oil-engines and tapped the barometer; for, as the ever-hopeful Skipper put it, "There'll be weather after this."

For the first time melancholy marked the Nut for its own. Between spasmodic efforts at the fly-wheel he lay on his bunk, surrounded by tins of cigarettes and cheap editions of Nat Gould.

"Let me see," he would remark to the sweltering silence, "we have about another two thousand miles to cover. At this rate we ought to do it comfortably in three years." After mature deliberation he also came to the conclusion that sailing was "a prehistoric mode of progression," and the Spinster and Freckles knew that he was dreaming of his car and English lanes in June-time.

That evening, to make matters worse, he sat on three jammed and buttered biscuits which the thoughtful Spinster regularly prepared and left on the table for the relieved watch.

"I'm full of rage," he informed the universe; "don't talk to me." And it did not.

Depression is infectious, and these were dolorous

times, but there were others that amply compensated. A breeze came at last—without the "weather" predicted by the Skipper, and the *Wanderlust* showed what she could do—one hundred to one hundred and twenty miles a day.

There are few things more exhilarating—to one with an inborn love of the sea—than grasping a tiller and "feeling" as well as seeing his ship—his home, skimming through blue waters to unknown lands, with a flurry of spurned foam on either hand and the log behind him ticking off the miles. Then there are sunsets, a glory of delicate tints and floating islands of cloud, and at night—the wide dome of a star-spangled sky, and hissing dark waters shot with phosphorescent gleams that swirl on deck and chase each other round the scuppers like spilt quicksilver, or, clinging to the mainsail, shimmer for a space and fade.

It is at such times as these that man thinks, and thinking, is humbled.

So, with varying weather, but never once with the "steady Westerlies" that are popularly supposed to prevail at that time of the year, the *Wanderlust* ploughed, raced or dawdled on her way, with never a turn of the propeller shaft to prove that man may cheat the elements.

By a mistake in subtraction the Skipper one day placed the *Wanderlust* sixty miles north of her course, but luckily discovered his error the following morning. Had he any real idea where he was? This became the question of the day.

Then ship's food became nauseating and a wild desire for the lowly but indispensable "spud" seized on every member of the crew. The Nut's disgust with the "prehistoric mode of progression" grew with his beard. Freckles became argumentative, and the Skipper—at least consistent—continued to forebode evil on every possible occasion. The Spinster alone maintained a uniform outward cheerfulness, and fully deserves the praise she has never received.

These were a few—only a few—of the signs of the times, and seemed to prove that nine days and nights in a *Wanderlust*, without sight of land, are quite sufficient for most people.

It was as well then that at 4 P.M. on the 18th June, and nine days out from Sydney, a faint voice filtered down to the cabin: "Who wants to see Lord Howe?"

For a fraction of time the Firm remained impassive, deeming this only another form of the Skipper's irony. However, the question was repeated, with an inflection of triumph in the voice, and the Firm hurled itself up the companion.

The Skipper was at the mast-head, but he was hardly noticed; every eye was trained on the horizon, and there, as the *Wanderlust* rose on a wave, was a blue-grey excrescence — land — *something that did not move*! Columbus was no more overjoyed at the sight of America. Depression, ennui, doubt fled on the instant. The Firm was again a parcel of grown-up children with an

Lord Howe looms

The Firm's Camp on Lord Howe Island: the Nut entertains Visitors

unlimited capacity for enjoyment. Even the Skipper's grunt of " We're not there yet " failed to affect their spirits.

" No," said the Nut, " but we soon shall be—unless a gale takes us back on our tracks, and the barometer's at 30·2. Sorry to disappoint ; who's for grub ? I can eat something."

Land sighted from a steamer is a very different affair to that " fetched " by a sailing vessel. In one case the passenger anticipates nothing else than landing on the date specified, and consequently misses the joys—and sorrows—of unexpectedness. If continuing his journey he strolls ashore, sees what sights he can in the time at his disposal, and returns to his deck-chair. In the other—and especially that of the *Wanderlust*—one felt that land had been won after a creditable tussle and at once took on an added interest.

Lord Howe ! All the information the Firm had been able to cull regarding this island—four hundred and eighty odd miles E.N.E. from Sydney—was that it was inhabited by one hundred and fifty souls who made a living by gathering the seed of the Kentia palm. Who were the one hundred and fifty souls ? What was the Kentia palm, and why were its seeds collected ?

The answers to these questions hardly promised enthralling interest, but the Islands constituted a break in a long and arduous journey, and as such was eagerly welcomed by the Firm. This

attitude towards Lord Howe Island only proves how grossly misleading anticipation may be, for of all the places afterwards visited none proved more captivating nor called with a more insistent voice for the *Wanderlust's* return.

The barometer held to its promise of fair weather, but to such purpose that the wind died down completely and most of the next day the Firm found itself in the tantalising position of gazing upon the land it had won, without approaching it one yard. Truly, if an oil-engine had ears, the *Wanderlust's* would have glowed red-hot.

Another day of faint breezes, and as the boat crept nearer one could appreciate Lord Howe's reputation as one of the best "pick-ups" for seafarers in the South Pacific. On the island itself two rugged peaks, Mount Gower and The Lidgeburg, rear their tree-clad summits 2800 feet above sea-level, and ten miles to the westward is Ball's Pyramid, a needle of volcanic rock sprouting 2000 feet sheer from the ocean, a strangely imposing sight. As a fact, it was afterwards ascertained that the *Wanderlust* sighted Lord Howe at eighty miles, and this from a deck only fifteen inches above the ocean.

Night descended when the *Wanderlust* was perhaps ten miles distant, and as though from sheer cussedness darkness was heralded by a stiff breeze from the westward. This meant that the *Wanderlust* would have to pass the Island by and hope for a favourable "slant" the following day,

or even—ghastly thought—be obliged to continue on her way without touching land at all. Truly, dependence on the winds of heaven is a precarious business, even as the Nut had hinted.

Meanwhile, in pitch darkness, the *Wanderlust* skimmed onwards towards an unseen, ironbound coast, and each succeeding watch wondered whose fate it would be to give the alarm. Presently, however, the wind dropped and out of the silent night came the deep-throated roar of surf on a distant beach. A few minutes later the moon rode clear of the cloud-wrack, disclosing a mighty face of rock, and at its foot a dim white line where the breakers hurled themselves upon it. It was an eerie sight—like some fantastic illustration to a fairy story: the tiny *Wanderlust*, with four still more tiny human beings in her cockpit, gazing up at the towering, moonlit crags of Lord Howe. So immense, so overpowering did the island appear that it seemed one could throw a stone on to its rocks, and the Firm felt convinced that it had escaped collision only by the timely appearance of the moon; yet at that moment they were probably three miles distant.

The wind having completely died out, all that remained was to drift until morning, or reach an anchorage by other means; so with further and fervent abuse hurled at the three hundredweight of scrap iron, the Firm manned the sweeps.

Again the weirdness of the situation could not help being borne in upon the mind. Two

ungainly oars ploughing phosphorescent caverns deep down in the dark, still waters. Four toiling insects, creeping in their shell along the foot of thousand-foot precipices, where dwelt other insects, asleep, unmindful of their approach.

The Skipper had heard of a beach and safe anchorage on the north-east of Lord Howe, and with the dawn a strip of white sand glinting between the jagged rocks off the shore made it appear that his information had been correct. A dark bank of cloud hung forbiddingly over the southern horizon, and as it spread faint puffs of wind bellied the *Wanderlust's* sails and carried her safely through a maze of rocks into the bay.

Three cable lengths from shore the anchor chain ran merrily out, and the Firm turned its attention to beautifying itself for the coming invasion. Oh, the agonies of disposing of a ten days' beard! The Spinster was invited to retire —to the cockpit, the bows, or any other vantage where she was *supposed* not to hear what went on in the cabin, while the Nut and Freckles joined in cries of mingled agony and wrath.

A very able writer has made the subject of hirsute appendage his own, but has he ever attempted to describe the removal of a ten days' "Catherine wheel"? This is the only possible description of hair that, from a given centre like the crown of the head, grows in ever-widening circles and makes shaving a torture. If you would attack it upward it proves to be the wrong

way of the grain, or downward, or to either side, it is the same. For those afflicted with a "Catherine wheel" the mere sight of a razor advertisement that talks glibly of "silky shaves" is as the red rag to the bull. Moreover, never let a lady tell you that her hair is "such a nuisance" without at least pointing silently to your chin.

But as time wore on and Freckles and the Nut still struggled amidst a medley of clothing and lather, the Skipper grew impatient. In spite of the *Wanderlust's* presence, no sign of life disturbed the sun-bathed calm of the beach, and he was no doubt anxious to hold discourse with some kindred spirit who would listen to his dirge.

The Firm watched him row ashore in the dinghy, saw him reach the breakers, soar upwards and topple headlong into a scurry of foam. The dinghy had turned a complete somersault and the Skipper crawled on to the sand like a half-drowned kitten. There he shook himself into dignity, hauled the dinghy ashore and vanished over the sand-dunes.

An hour, two hours passed by and the Firm still rode at anchor, alternately "prinking" itself and gazing through binoculars at the deserted beach. It even occurred to them that perhaps this was not Lord Howe at all; but presently three men, two women and a child clambered over the sand-dunes, headed by the Skipper. Five times they tried to launch the dinghy, and five times it was whirled from their grasp in the

breakers and hurled ashore. At last the Skipper came bobbing over the rollers and finally drew alongside, with a smile that had not creased his already wrinkled countenance for many a day.

"It's all right," he told the expectant Firm, "lagoon on the other side—good anchorage."

What he did not say, however, and what the Firm afterwards discovered to be the truth, was that the *Wanderlust* was the first craft that had dared to anchor in Blinkenthorpe's Bay, where they happened to be at the present moment, and that if they ever got out again they might consider themselves extremely lucky.

The subsequent manœuvres of the *Wanderlust* were regarded by the Firm as the most exhilarating and enjoyable they had yet experienced. Never once did it occur to their blissfully ignorant minds that dodging through a maze of submerged and exposed rocks before a six-knot breeze was anything but a fascinating part of a fascinating game. The mighty cliffs and chasms of Lord Howe catch the wind and hurl it back upon the ocean in unexpected and powerful gusts. These, the *Wanderlust*, with her racing build, responded to by heeling over and literally bounding through the water. Sheer rock buttresses of enormous height, mysterious caves and boulder-strewn beaches, dwarfed to insignificance by the towering cliffs above them, and here and there pockets of green vegetation, contrasting vividly with their grim surroundings, the whole seen through

a cloud of whirling, crying sea-birds. All this the *Wanderlust* sped by, clearing scattered surf-washed rocks by a few yards, with the Skipper—tense and obviously anxious—perched on the gunwale, straining at the tiller. Could she clear the next jagged headland ? It seemed an impossibility ; yet it was done by a few feet.

The Skipper must be given due credit for a splendid effort of seamanship in scudding round treacherous Lord Howe in less than two hours. The inhabitants of the island, keen seamen all, shook their heads and marvelled.

In due course the *Wanderlust* ran into a sheltered bay, and picking up the "leads"—two white arrows in line on a distant hill-side—slipped cleanly through the narrow channel of the reef into a still lagoon.

The first stage of her troublous voyage was over, and she richly deserved the glistening coat of paint she received a few days later in token of her owners' approval.

VII

LORD HOWE

No sooner had the *Wanderlust* cleared the channel in the reef than a whale-boat put out from shore with what looked like the entire population of Lord Howe aboard. Men clung to the mast, perched on bows and stern, or sagged over the gunwales in human festoons. These were the welcoming committee, and uncommonly glad the Firm was to see again some human faces other than their own.

There followed a period of embarrassment and doubt. What was one supposed to do under the circumstances? The welcoming committee rested on their oars a few yards distant and craned their necks to catch a better view of the strange little craft that had happened amongst them, while the Firm gazed back in tentative silence. Heaven knows how long the trying situation would have lasted, had not the impetuous Freckles waved his hand in greeting, and the whale-boat burst into a responsive cheer of welcome. From that moment the Firm felt it was among friends. Swiftly they ran alongside and swarmed over the *Wanderlust's* tiny deck, examining every stick and stay.

THE WELCOMING COMMITTEE ABOARD THE *WANDERLUST*

"If she carried you here I suppose she'll carry us," exclaimed the twenty-seventh to clamber aboard.

Whisky and lime juice were produced, also four tin mugs and three glasses, and the Firm's health was drunk assiduously. The visitors, it appeared, had been on the look-out for the *Wanderlust* ever since they had seen the notice of her projected departure in the Sydney papers, but some mistake had been made in the size of the ship; they had expected a sixty-ton vessel instead of a six. Their surprise was great.

"Sorry to disappoint you," said Freckles.

"Disappoint!" roared someone. "We're all the better pleased to see you."

It was a jovial company that wedged itself on the *Wanderlust's* deck, and with jest and laughter passed a sun-bathed hour on the transparent waters of Lord Howe lagoon. The visitors were as fine a set of men as one could wish to see, and listening to their talk and watching their ways, Freckles looked forward to getting into closer touch with them. These were the Kentia palm seed gatherers. How did they live? What were their hopes, and ambitions, and disappointments? What constituted their lives on this lonely rock in the South Pacific? He was soon to know.

For the present, however, there were other things to be attended to. An old mooring cable lay somewhere on the coral bed of the lagoon, but exactly where no one seemed to know, so the

whale-boat was dispatched with divers aboard who, fully dressed (in shirt and trousers), scoured the surrounding waters for upwards of an hour. Time is of as little object on Lord Howe Island as elsewhere in the South Pacific.

At last it was run to earth, the *Wanderlust's* anchor attached to it, and the entire company conveyed ashore in the now still more bulgent whale-boat.

On shore the women-folk of the island waited to receive their guests, and at once swarmed round the Spinster. In fact the Firm and its effects were wafted up the beach and through the bordering palm groves by a kindly tide of humanity. Without any reference to the important subject of accommodation, they were escorted to their quarters, a clean and commodious shed, and a meal prepared in the adjoining house of an islander. After ship's food, and sometimes little of that, it may be imagined how chicken and sweet potatoes, stewed guava and cream, not to mention yeast bread and other little luxuries, were appreciated.

For fully an hour after landing the Firm was in a semi-dazed condition. It is difficult to describe the sensation of being suddenly transferred from the restrictions of an eight by ten cabin and a narrow rut of routine to unlimited space and freedom. They take time to realise. So must a bird feel when it has escaped from the cage. Then there was the matter of regaining

"land legs," a far greater problem, it may be mentioned, than acquiring "sea legs." For three days the Firm rocked where it stood, or staggered suddenly and without apparent cause, to the vast amusement of the islanders. Limbs can be obstinate on occasion, and in this instance they refused to believe that they were no longer outstretched on a narrow bunk or cramped into the cockpit of the rocking *Wanderlust.*

The Nut was quite overcome. After an ample meal he lay at length in an arm-chair, with the half-closed eyes of ecstasy, murmuring: "Dry land! Dry land!"

He, and in fact the entire Firm, caused the islanders unending amusement, so it is hoped that their unrivalled hospitality was in some part repaid. At any moment, when the spirit moved them, they would drop into "camp" (without knocking, to the lasting dread of the Spinster), and sit quietly on an orange crate, waiting to be entertained, and it was seldom long before something would occur to send them into peals of laughter. At one time it was the Nut's pantomimic description of certain British army officers at revolver practice; at another Freckles' impressions of steering the *Wanderlust* at night before a heavy following sea. The Spinster they seemed to hold in some awe, as a being altogether beyond their ken. They held the view, it seemed, that the adventures of a couple of male buffoons, no matter how unpleasant, were just

cause for mirth, but those of a woman beyond a joke.

Many were the pleasant evenings the Firm spent, listening to Harry Lauder bray and b-r-r-r-r-r on the gramophone, or to the far more entertaining yarns of the islanders. Theirs is truly an ideal existence. With tempering sea breezes on all sides they enjoy a perfect climate. Colds and all the minor ills to which crowded communities are prone pass them by. There is not a malcontent amongst them. In short, they are a white people with all the spontaneous warm-heartedness of true islanders, unspoilt by contamination with the outside world. For although Lord Howe is only four hundred and eighty odd miles from Sydney, it is visited but once a month by a steamer, and then only for a few hours.

Long may it be before the tourist thoroughly discovers Lord Howe!

Such phenomenal contentment and prosperity are sufficiently striking in these days to call for inspection. Lord Howe was first settled by three Buckinghamshire men and their Maori wives, who landed from a whaling-ship. Until then the island had been regarded as a barren rock, though there are many now who think it played a far more important part in the world's past. It first came under serious notice, however, by being favourably reported upon to the Imperial Government by a vessel sent to survey Norfolk Island as a possible convict settlement, and for some

Diving for Cable in Lord Howe Lagoon

Bird Life on Lord Howe Island

time after annexation the question hung in the balance as to whether Lord Howe should be used for the same purpose. Happily, it escaped this grizzly fate, and continued as the chance landing-place of whalers and other seafaring flotsam who, succumbing to the natural beauties of the place, promptly settled down, grew enough to live on, and with the help of "long-haired mates" brought from various odd corners of the Pacific, reared large and healthy families.

It first occurred to a visiting Australian business man that such beautiful palms as those growing in abundance all over the island ought to have a market value, and a company was formed for the gathering and export of the seed. The enterprise grew and was ultimately taken over by the Commonwealth Government, which controls it to this day.

The Kentia palm—though little known by name—has come to be considered by nurserymen as among the most beautiful of ornamental plants, and may be seen anywhere in Europe, America and Australasia, where the palm is an essential decoration. The Firm recognised it at once as an old acquaintance of hotel winter gardens, restaurants and concert platforms, and marvelled that it had never occurred to them to ask where it came from. Lord Howe Island is its birthplace, and, what is still more curious, this isolated rock in the South Pacific is the *only place in the world where it will bear seed.*

The few scientists who have visited the island are at a loss to account for this, but it is only one of many problems that shroud Lord Howe and make it so intensely interesting. Another is that there are eighty different species of land shell on the island, seventy-five per cent. of which are to be found nowhere else. A land shell cannot travel by sea; how, then, did they come to be here? Is the island a remnant of some submerged and forgotten continent? Some day Lord Howe will become the Mecca of the naturalist.

Under Commonwealth government the island practically became a reserve. Original settlers and their descendants were allowed to remain, but they can neither own nor lease land. Theirs is a permissive occupancy. To counterbalance this obvious drawback the Government pays a standard wage of four shillings a bushel for gathering seed, and also presents every islander—male and female—with shares in the Kentia palm industry—twenty-five at birth, and fifty at the age of twenty-one. These bring in about three pounds, ten shillings a month, so it is possible for each islander to make approximately three pounds per week.

With this they seem entirely satisfied. Freckles asked several if they never pined for greater riches, a chance of expansion, but invariably met with the same answer: "We have a comfortable living, a home, and our wives and children; what more do we want?"

Happy Lord Howe islanders ! Far be it from a chance visitor to sow the seeds of discontent among you.

During the days that followed the Firm explored the island, in company with the seed-gatherers, and wrestled with the cinematograph camera. A film of " The Kentia Palm Industry " rather appealed to the Nut.

The method of collecting and packing the seed for export is supremely simple. An islander merely buckles a strap into a loop, slips it over his bare and horny feet, and using this as a clinging foothold, climbs the palm trunk after the manner of the " monkey on a stick." The hanging bunches of seed are tugged from the palm and the gatherer slithers to the ground at tremendous speed. The seeds are shelled into a sack, which, when sufficiently heavy — usually about one hundred and eighty pounds—is strapped to a wooden frame and carried on the islander's back over precipitous hill and dale to the sheds. Here they are thoroughly mixed with the decayed root of the banyan-tree, which is found in immense quantities all over the island, and is considered the very best packing for seeds of any kind. They are then bagged and shipped by whale-boat to the monthly steamer, which anchors outside the reef.

Outsiders are now, alas, rigorously barred from settling on Lord Howe and entering into the Kentia palm industry. Only one course is open

—to marry an islander and at once become the possessor of a comfortable home and a wife with a substantial "dot." Many a wandering sailorman has done this in the past, and no doubt many more will do so in the future, for although five pounds have been offered for the ceremony, an islander has never yet married an islander.

As for the interior of Lord Howe Island, it can only be said that it is as peacefully beautiful as the coast-line is magnificently grim. The whole island is only seven miles long by one broad, yet in this small area Nature seems to have packed her gifts as in a treasure chest. The Firm wandered enchanted along narrow paths, through endless glades of graceful palms.

The Nut sat beneath one and pleaded a moment wherein to imagine himself in the winter garden of the Carlton, but was dragged to his feet by the Spinster and admonished for a vandal.

Here and there amongst the thick clusters of palms and flowering underbrush mighty banyan-trees reared their tousled heads of vine-covered branches, or lowered an aerial root in search of a fresh hold on Mother Earth. These strange trees have often as many as two hundred trunks, connected at their summits by a transverse branch, and at a distance, or at dusk, look like the pillars of some forgotten temple in the heart of the Bush.

One of these trees on Lord Howe Island covers the almost incredible area of three acres; but when it is taken into consideration that for every large

Freckles and the Nut struggle with the Cinematograph Camera on Lord Howe

Masked Gannet and Young

trunk that has rotted at the root, and now hangs decaying from its transverse branch, there are from three to five aerial roots descending to take a fresh grip of the soil, the possible dimensions of the banyan may be better realised.

Thirty years ago a settler found an aerial root of one of these trees descending upon the road. He caught its end, a tassel of milk-white roots, and tied it back to a palm, with the result that to-day the unfortunate palm is being slowly throttled by a lusty banyan trunk.

The bird life of Lord Howe is particularly interesting. The island council, a small body of men elected to manage local affairs, passed an edict forbidding the slaughter of birds on the island, with the result that both land and sea birds on Lord Howe have no fear of man. Freckles rather doubted this until he penetrated some distance into the Bush of Mount Gower, and stood in dense scrub surrounded by birds to within a few feet. He whistled and raised his hand. The birds fluttered as though hesitant, then came gradually nearer, until one, more daring than the rest, settled on his sleeve.

The mutton birds are even more fearless. These strange creatures, whose flesh looks and tastes exactly like fat mutton, will strut about a man's very feet like domestic hens, hold their head at an appreciative angle while he scratches their topnot of feathers, and in a very short time perch all over him.

The sea-birds — wideawake tern, white-cap noddy, puffins, boatswain birds and the like are equally tame, and it is quite possible, without a screen of any sort, for a photographer to bring his camera within a few yards of them.

Nowhere is there a better illustration of what may be accomplished by humane methods with birds than on Lord Howe.

With such a list of this little island's virtues set before them, there may be those who will wonder if its disadvantages have been omitted. The Firm can only answer for itself—and in the negative. Each member has already decided that when he has done all and seen all of which he is capable, Lord Howe shall rest his bones.

VIII

DISASTER

Five joyous days the Firm spent on Lord Howe. It was to have been two, but certain factors conspired to postpone the departure. The first of these was the *Wanderlust's* counter, which had "opened up" during the gale to such an alarming extent that some kind of patching was absolutely necessary. Two oakum-oozing cracks, three-quarters of an inch wide, ran clean across her stern, and the islanders made it known that they flatly refused to see the *Wanderlust* take the open sea in such a condition.

"I'd like you to punch a hole in the old thing," observed one of the Spinster's lady friends. "We don't want to see you go at all, but in a thing like that——"

"Hush!" pleaded the Spinster, "she'll hear, and she's a good little ship, really."

The other laughed. Only the women of Lord Howe dared to laugh at the Spinster.

The repairs were executed in characteristic fashion. A council of islanders decided that the only possible thing to do was to nail beaten lead along the seams and paint it over, and there being no spare sheet lead on the island, one of their

number promptly tore it off his own roof gutters for the purpose.

Even when they had done the work—refusing all payment—and the *Wanderlust* rode at anchor "tight" and white under her layer of paint, the Firm was pressed to stay another day, only one more! A tremendous evening was promised them—roast chicken and music! They stayed, and the promise was fulfilled to such purpose that the Firm returned singing to camp at two o'clock in the morning.

Palm groves, moonlight, laughter! This is Lord Howe. Is it to be wondered at, then, that the Nut fell in love? She was . . . but that is hardly fair; suffice it that two very intent young people strolled among the palms, and it was a sorry Nut who was ultimately dragged by force to the whale-boat and bundled aboard the *Wanderlust*.

Never has the Firm felt a leave-taking more acutely than when the *Wanderlust* slipped again through the channel in the reef, drawing slowly away from the sunlit crags of Lord Howe and a whale-boat of waving, cheering islanders.

"E-hew!" sighed the Nut, viewing the familiar cabin strewn mostly with his cigarette tins and cheap editions of Nat Gould.

"Just so," agreed Freckles, gazing over the ship's wake.

"Never mind," chirped the ever-cheerful Spinster. "Norfolk Island will be just as nice."

"It's your watch, Mr Nut," said the Skipper. And so the Firm slipped back into its rut of routine with a click like a dislocated arm.

Fair winds prevailed for two days, making even the Skipper cheerful, then came calms—stark, oily calms—during which the Firm disposed itself about the deck, reading, working sofa cushion covers, or whistling for a wind. Every now and then someone would survey the brazen sky and mutter, "Engine!" but expletives were exhausted, and there was no response.

Wearied of sofa cushion covers, the Spinster relieved the monotony by descending to the cabin in her bulgent knickers, and shortly appearing in a suit of light blue pyjamas, neatly converted into everyday apparel by the touch of a white Peter Pan collar. She was received with cheers, but both Freckles and the Nut shook their heads when pressed to go and do likewise. They emphatically refused to remove a stitch of their clothing or a hair of their beards until they reached Norfolk Island.

"I have decided never to shave again," added the Nut, stroking his still tender chin. "Life is sad enough."

From sheer boredom he presently descended to the cabin, and the Spinster and Freckles, peering through the roof, descried him wrestling with the fly-wheel of the engine!

"It's all right now," he told them almost

gleefully; "the shaft's rusted and the fly-wheel's jammed as solid as a rock!"

It was true. Oh, that engine! It will remain in the Firm's memory as a monumental travesty to the end of time.

With calms and varying winds the *Wanderlust* struggled on her way for eight seemingly interminable days, and the Skipper took to going aloft at odd intervals to look for Norfolk Island. This being low-lying land—compared with Lord Howe—he was afraid of passing it by. But his calculations proved perfectly correct, and on the morning of the ninth day the watch descried a long, low island on the port bow, almost hidden under a black bank of cloud.

For the rest of the day the *Wanderlust* crept towards it under every stitch of canvas before a light breeze, and the Firm spent its time in beautifying itself once more. On the question of his beard the Nut was still adamant, but—"I'm going to pretend I'm yachting," he informed the assembled company, and after two hours' sole occupancy of the cabin reappeared in a faultless "costume" of white flannels, silk socks and a polo helmet. "Think I'll do?" he inquired complacently.

The Spinster and Freckles shaded their eyes from the glittering apparition and dived below.

It was a resplendent Firm that ultimately gathered on deck and watched the pine-clad slopes of Norfolk Island draw slowly nearer.

Mutton Birds on Mount Gower, Lord Howe Island

The *Wanderlust* leaving Lord Howe Island escorted by Farewell Committee

"I see no signs of a reception," complained the Nut. "Is it possible——"

But at that moment the Skipper sighted a whale-boat putting out from shore, and slowed down to await them. Through the binoculars it proved to contain eight men, but of a very different type to the Lord Howe islanders. There was something smug in the appearance of several of them that suggested officialdom, and when they drew alongside this opinion was confirmed.

There was no hesitancy about stepping aboard; they came with authority—a doctor, the clerk of the court, the then governor's aide-de-camp and a policeman. The Firm was duly impressed, and Freckles led them "through the yacht's spacious corridors" to the cabin. Here everyone found room to sit on something—a hat, a tin of cigarettes, a cinematograph camera or a half-packed suit-case, and amenities commenced.

"We heard of your coming," said the clerk of the court.

"More room than I thought," politely observed the "aide," at the same moment knocking his knee against the chronometer.

"Have any bad weather?" inquired the policeman.

Freckles answered one and all by producing a bottle of rum. Norfolk Island is under prohibition.

The doctor murmured something about "bill of health," but it was lost in the tide of

conversation. Officialdom had dropped from the assembled company like a veil. There were tennis and golf to be had on Norfolk Island; were these not sufficient topics of conversation?

Meanwhile, the Skipper was making anxious inquiries about an anchorage. According to the pilot and his crew, who had rowed the whaleboat, there were many, but no harbour. Norfolk Island could offer nothing but an open roadstead —except Emily Bay, a lagoon on the south side of the island. The channel in the reef was narrow and shallow, but surely the *Wanderlust*, drawing five feet, could get through. So said the pilot, and under his guidance she was headed in that direction.

It was a perfect day of brilliant sunshine and fair breezes, but the surf on an exposed reef seldom abates under any conditions. At Emily Bay the ocean swell was breaking on the coral bar in lathers of foam that formed a dead white line clean across the bay. The Firm could discern no passage, but concluded that they were in capable hands and continued to watch the approaching land, and discuss the various pleasures that awaited them there.

Freckles was still in the cabin, wedged between the doctor and the cinematograph camera, when a slight scraping sound told that the *Wanderlust* had grazed the coral. No one took the slightest notice; the subject at the moment was the probable fate of that year's Davis Cup — what

would you ? But when the scraping sound was repeated, and followed almost immediately by an ominous bump, a sudden silence fell on the company, and men looked inquiringly at one another.

The doctor was the first on deck, closely followed by an avalanche of clerk of court, policeman and aide-de-camp. Freckles, still seated beside the cinematograph camera, saw these gentlemen reach the cockpit, stare seaward for an instant with drooping jaws, and dissolve into a turmoil of green water.

Almost simultaneously the *Wanderlust* heeled over and smote the reef with a crash that shot Freckles head foremost through a forest of glasses into a cabin locker. Hastily extricating himself, he waded through a medley of floating paraphernalia to the deck, and looked round on a scene of utter disaster.

The *Wanderlust*, with seven drenched human beings clinging to her rigging, was broadside on to the reef, and nothing that mortal man could do would save her from being pounded to splinters.

There was no time to think coherently, much less act, before another roller surged towards the stricken ship. Those clinging to the rigging watched it, fascinated. Upward it curled, and, descending, burst in their very midst. The mizen was swept away as though it were a wisp of straw, and Freckles with it, but by blind fortune he found himself clinging to a stay-end, and aided

by a lurch of the ship, managed to clamber back to the deck.

For the first time he noticed that the whale-boat was manned—by two of the pilot's crew, whose puny efforts at rowing were almost laughable. They evidently thought there was some hope of towing the *Wanderlust* away from the reef, for they rowed like madmen—until a third roller carried them flying past the ship in the opposite direction. The tow rope held, however, and during a momentary lull the whale-boat sheered alongside.

"Jump! Jump!" yelled the oarsmen, and the Firm, mingled with doctor, clerk of court and aide-de-camp, took a flying leap.

No sooner had they fallen into the bottom of the boat and crawled to their places than a wave crashed down upon them, literally splitting the whale-boat in two.

Freckles felt himself going down—down; then it occurred to him to swim, and he shot upward, coming into violent contact with the bottom of the *Wanderlust*. It seemed an age before he reached the surface, and when he did the first things his eyes rested on were the two separate halves of the whale-boat and the clerk of court (by the colour of his clothes) fighting frenziedly with his jacket that had wrapped itself about his head.

A few strokes brought Freckles to the reef, and, clambering on to it, he found the Spinster, the

Nut and various other indistinguishable gentlemen already there bracing themselves waist-deep against the rushing water.

Luckily the tide was on the ebb, but night was coming on and it was bitterly cold. The Firm presented a particularly sorry spectacle in their bedraggled finery.

"B-b-bad l-luck," chattered the clerk of the court sympathetically.

Freckles looked towards the stricken *Wanderlust*, and thinking of all she contained, swore vigorously.

"T-too b-b-bad," consoled the clerk of the court.

Perhaps his wrath at sight of the poor little *Wanderlust* being pounded to pieces helped to keep Freckles' blood in circulation, for he hardly realised the cold until the presence of his companions was borne in upon him; and then—it was almost impossible not to smile. They still stood with parted legs braced against the combers, staring forlornly shoreward and literally quaking with cold. The Nut particularly, with his immaculate "costume" clinging to him like a wet bathing-dress, was convulsed. His knees, his arms, his head, all seemed engaged in an eccentric dance. The Spinster, with her skirt caught about her waist, to offer less resistance to the water, caught Freckles' eye, and her lips parted in a tremulous, purple-tinted grin.

"All right?" yelled Freckles above the boom of the breakers.

She nodded and grinned afresh like a flickering cinema picture. Her pluck and presence of mind throughout the entire proceedings were phenomenal.

Every now and then the doctor and Freckles were constrained to try and do something. Exactly what, they themselves could not have said, but to some people inaction in time of disaster is well-nigh insupportable. They tried to move towards the *Wanderlust*—perchance to push her clear of the reef single-handed—at any rate they moved, and paid the penalty by falling headlong into a pit in the treacherous coral and floundering out again, bruised and bleeding. Freckles swore, and wondered why no one laughed; the doctor was beyond speech, but, regaining his feet, stood braced and motionless, chin in air, eyes fixed defiantly on space like the statue of a fighting gladiator.

By this time some interest in the proceedings was being evinced by people on shore. One could see riders galloping hither and thither, and dim shapes flitting along the beach. The thirty-foot channel of the reef was all that separated the shipwrecked mariners from connection with dry land over perhaps half-a-mile of pitted coral, but through that channel the water rushed like a mill-race; moreover, everyone was too convulsed with shivering to swim five strokes.

The Firm naturally imagined that all the movement on shore meant their speedy rescue,

The Scene of the Disaster: Emily Bay Reef, Norfolk Island

Splinters of the *Wanderer*

but they were soon disillusioned. The riders approached to the edge of the cliff, perhaps half-a-mile distant, those on foot gathered about them, and fully half the population of Norfolk Island was treated for the next hour and a half to a really entertaining spectacle. It is not often that uneventful Norfolk Island has the opportunity of seeing its doctor, aide-de-camp, policeman and clerk of court, not to mention the crew of a yacht, water-washed and shivering on a coral reef almost at their feet, and they appeared to appreciate it. Youths on horseback threw one leg over the pommel of their saddles and gazed their fill, or discussed the situation with their lady friends.

"Front seats ten-and-six," chattered Freckles, nodding involuntarily towards the cliff. "If only we had the cinema!"

The Spinster favoured him with one of her blue-lipped, cinematograph smiles.

For two hours the distinguished company on the reef shivered and waited. It was now almost dark, and the audience on the cliff began to disperse, disappointed, no doubt, at the brevity of the show.

"Is t-there any l-l-likelihood of a b-boat taking us off t-to-night?" the Nut inquired of the policeman.

The latter could not repress a smile as he pointed shoreward. One was coming at last. It transpired later that there had been some hesitation in launching the boat without the consent of

the " president " of the " company," who owned it, and who happened to be on a visit inland at the time.

As they were being rowed ashore, crouched in the bottom of the boat for shelter and too cold to move or speak, the Firm could still hear the relentless breakers pounding on the reef, and saw in their mind's eye the poor little *Wanderlust*—their ship and home, that had carried them safely over a thousand miles of storm-tossed ocean—quivering and rending under the assault. It was as though they had left some live thing to be battered to death back there on the reef.

IX

SALVAGE

THE Spinster had no sooner been lifted from the boat than kindly women ran forward with blankets outheld, and, wrapped in one of these, she was led up the beach, followed by the rest of the dazed and shivering Firm.

They were going somewhere; this they knew by the mechanical movement of their legs, and they were being led by someone with a pleasant, insistent voice.

"Terrible, terrible," it kept repeating. "After coming all that way too. Terrible!"

Something dark swallowed the Firm—perhaps a grove of pine-trees—and, emerging on the farther side, they saw the welcome lights of a warm, dry house. They felt it *must* be warm and dry, and they were not mistaken. Moreover, it was the doctor's.

Each member was bundled into a separate room, towels and odd—but dry—garments were thrown after them, and they presently emerged to gather round a spirit tantalus in the dining-room. Thank heaven prohibition has not yet reached the stage on Norfolk Island when Government officials must forgo their night-cap.

Under the comforting influence of the spirit they became artificially hilarious, and laughed consumedly at one another's appearance, while the doctor and his good lady stood by, no doubt wondering if they were harbouring a party of lunatics. The Spinster, in a blue sweater falling about her in folds, and a grey flannel skirt reaching barely to her knees, looked like the fisher-girl of reality rather than romance. The Nut turned up the collar of a black cloth jacket, thereby instantly converting himself into a life-like Apache, and Freckles, in the doctor's trousers, that could have encircled him twice without straining a button, danced a few steps to heighten his already striking resemblance to a well-known music hall comedian.

A sumptuous meal followed, but it was destined to be cut short by a messenger from the beach. The tide was now dead low, it appeared, and the islanders were already engaged in salving what they could from the wreck.

The very word brought back the Firm's tribulations in a flood, and it was a sombre party that picked its way through the pine groves to the beach and rowed out to the reef.

Here salvage operations were going on apace. It was a strange sight. The reef was alive with the moving lights of hurricane lanterns, as their owners hurried hither and thither searching the pools and crevices in the coral for what they could find before the tide turned. A lantern would be

placed on the rock, there would be a splash in a neighbouring pool, and a man would presently emerge, holding aloft a tin of tomatoes, a fragment of the Skipper's sextant or a parcel of "trade" looking-glasses. Someone found the Nut's polo helmet, and, clapping it on his head, continued the frenzied search.

It was heart-breaking to look at the *Wanderlust*. She lay on her side high and dry, a mere egg-shell that Nature had taken it into her head to crack. She had no bottom, only the deck and a few planks still clinging to the ribbing. Freckles turned from her, sick at heart.

Suddenly the light of a lantern flashed into his eyes.

"What's this?" queried someone behind it.

"This" proved to be the cinematograph camera, minus its lens and dripping salt water, but otherwise unharmed. It had been found at the bottom of a six-foot-deep pool, thirty yards from the wreck. But far more miraculous escapes from destruction were registered that night. Tins of sardines, corned beef and fruit were found battered out of recognition, yet an unprotected glass lamp chimney was retrieved from a cranny in the coral without so much as a crack or blemish about it.

Diving was continued until the in-coming tide made it impossible, and it must be remarked here how splendidly the islanders worked—especially the policeman and an old, grey-bearded gentle-

man who will be heard of later. All treasure trove was carried to the whale-boat which had been waiting on the inside of the reef and was now rowed ashore, laden deep with the half-naked, shivering divers and a strangely assorted cargo. This was locked in a shed on the beach to await inspection in the morning, and the Firm soon found itself seated round the doctor's blazing log fire.

This was the first real opportunity they had had to think, and now, staring silently into the flames, they thought—long, sad thoughts. The *Wanderlust* was no more. The "Venturesome Voyage" was at an end. After covering a thousand miles—and the worst part of the projected journey—they had encountered a reef in perfect weather and succumbed. It all seemed so unnecessary. As the Nut put it: "If there had been a sound cause for the disaster there would have been some sense in it."

How, then, had the accident occurred? The Spinster, waxing eloquent in the warmth of the fire, made it perfectly clear. She had witnessed it from beginning to end. Under mainsail and mizen, to counteract the strength of the current surging outward through the reef passage, the *Wanderlust* was being towed in by the whale-boat, and had reached the mouth of the channel when she overran the boat. Before the tow rope could be cut her nose had been jerked round and her stern swung on to a coral ledge. In the swirl of

cross currents no amount of pulling by the whaleboat oarsmen could budge the *Wanderlust* an inch, and the breakers soon did their work.

Mariners can place the fault where they will, but let no man speak until he has had dealings with a reef passage. It is doubtful if anything more tricky and treacherous exists in the whole realm of ocean navigation.

See then the Firm, seated round a fire in weird apparel, trying to realise their position and failing utterly, through sheer exhaustion of mind and body. Enter to them a young lady, who seats herself in an arm-chair and beams upon them.

"I was so sorry to hear of your dreadful accident," she gushes. "I am the local correspondent of *The Sydney Clarion*; *please* tell me how it happened."

There is a long pause, then the Nut lifts his weary head.

"We were making war on the world," he informs her gravely, "and our weapons were cotton-wool. Is there anything else you'd like to know?"

Heaven knows, and the Firm little cares what report of the wreck of the *Wanderlust* went into *The Sydney Clarion*.

In spite of weariness their sleep was fitful that night. In the silence and darkness their minds travelled back over the day's cyclonic happenings, and they started wide-eyed at the remembrance of cherished possessions that were now

lying somewhere in the bed of the ocean. Among many other articles the Spinster had lost a small suit-case containing every penny she had brought with her. With a shock that caused his bed to quake Freckles suddenly realised that a dispatch-case containing the original and only manuscript of a new novel, and four chapters of these chronicles were at that moment probably providing food for the fishes. Could they ever be rewritten ? The Nut bemoaned the loss of a pair of brown boots that had taken him three years to coax into the desirable colour, and twenty-four silk collars of his own design. He seemed to begrudge the sea nothing else. It was a terrible night.

In the morning a drear procession wended its way to the beach and inspected the water-logged salvage. There was little of value amongst it, but one of the islanders suggested an auction sale and the Firm listlessly agreed. Zest in life had departed from the " venturesome voyagers " for the time being. However, notices were posted on various news bulletin boards throughout the island, and the following morning a goodly crowd collected on the beach. The clerk of the court very kindly offered his services as auctioneer, and with the blue waters of the lagoon and a glistening stretch of coral sand for background the sale began.

The Firm seated itself on a neighbouring sand-dune and listened to each familiar article being

Cornish Quintal, direct descendant of the *Bounty* Mutineers, and Rescuer in chief to the Firm

"Treasure Trove": Fletcher Christian, direct descendant of the leader of the *Bounty* Mutiny, diving for canned Tomatoes

put up and knocked down with an indifference born of dejection.

"The rainy season is coming on," boomed the auctioneer. "Now, what offers for this handsome umbrella?"

It was Freckles'. He had given one-and-sixpence for it during a shower of rain in Sydney, but it fetched four shillings.

"And now," resumed the auctioneer, indicating a row of battered tins, "we come to the delicacies —two ox tongue, six sardines, three herrings in tomato sauce, four devilled kidneys and seven milks. How much for the lot?"

They went for a great deal more than had been given for them, and the Firm began to take an interest in proceedings. It was really remarkable the prices that such useless articles as a packet of rusty jews' harps or pulpy "trade" belts realised.

The Firm stirred uneasily as though at some guilty remembrance when the word engine caught their ear. This was sold for four pound ten to a "whaler" who harboured the delusion that "it might be useful in the boat." As ballast or a means of propulsion he did not say, but in either case the Firm's sympathy goes out to him in his sore affliction.

The bidding was especially keen among the ladies, who hustled and wrangled in quite the approved "bargain counter style." One in particular seemed bent on securing a set of enamelled ware utensils which happened to

include an article of intimate toilet use. She secured it—at a higher price than it would have cost in the local store—and rode off in triumph, amidst cheers and laughter, with the *pièce de résistance* tinkling merrily at her saddle bow.

"The wreck," meaning all that remained of the *Wanderlust* which had been washed ashore from the reef during the night, fetched thirty shillings, and the sale netted in all thirty pounds —precisely enough to carry the Firm and its Skipper back to Sydney.

There was no boat for two weeks, and as it was impossible to trespass further on the good doctor's hospitality, they moved to the house of one Tom Adams, who will also be heard of later, and for twenty-five shillings a week, paid out of Freckles' rapidly dwindling money belt, they were supplied with bed and board, and considerately left to live down their troubles.

The first task was to sort out their personal belongings, a medley of salt-water-soaked suit-cases, cameras, clothing, photographic plates and cinematograph films, and, in the case of the Nu , tins of cigarettes. It was a pathetic sight to see this unfortunate seated at a table in a ten days' beard and a polo helmet, opening tin after tin, and finding each awash with a dull brown mess that had once been a Bond Street brand of Turkish cigarette.

The Spinster went about things with her usual method, and before evening the three verandahs

of the house and a barbed-wire fence were festooned with the Firm's ruined paraphernalia. Freckles spent most of his time struggling alternately with his hopelessly rusted typewriter and the cinematograph camera, but neither showed the least improvement for his efforts. The Skipper, too, was not immune. Although the *Wanderlust*, being unregistered and uninsured, saved him the unwelcome publicity of a formal "inquiry," his master's certificate had gone down in Freckles' dispatch-case, and no amount of diving on the reef succeeded in bringing it to light. As was perhaps natural, now that he had a genuine grievance, never a murmur of discontent passed his lips.

Truly, for an all-round chastening influence, it would be hard to find the equal of a shipwreck. One reads of such things, and if of an adventurous spirit, possibly sighs for a like experience. No one need do so. It is not romantic; it is not even amusing—only intensely disagreeable.

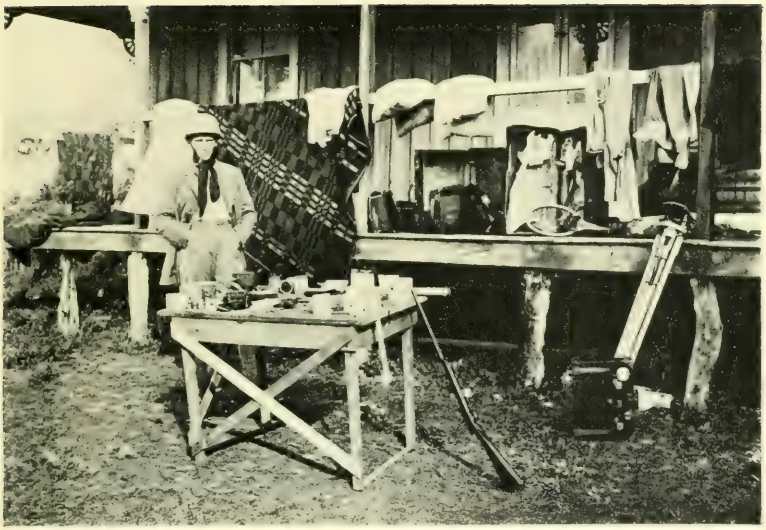
X

NORFOLK ISLAND

It was some days before the Firm could bring itself to take an intelligent interest in its surroundings. The loss of the *Wanderlust*, and the consequent upheaval of all their cherished plans, hung over each member like a cloud.

Freckles, who hated nothing more thoroughly than uncertainty, called a board meeting, and there and then the Firm's destiny was mapped out. It would go on. It had not come fourteen thousand miles to be cheated of its goal by a mere wreck. To the Islands! If it were obliged to work its passage, or even suffer deck quoits and eleven-o'clock beef-tea on an ordinary liner—to the Islands!

In the meantime there were twelve long days to be disposed of before it would be possible to make a fresh start, and each killed time in his and her own fashion. For the Spinster there were always walks, and sofa cushion covers—worked in silk that had been to the bottom of the sea and apparently remained unharmed. For the Nut there was a horse—of sorts, and in a pair of jodpores—certainly the first seen on Norfolk Island—he treated the natives to exhibition solo



The Day after the Wreck: the Nut and his effects

The Nut (in whiskers) sorts his Salvage

polo played with a home-made stick and ball. For Freckles there were explorations and discoveries that kept him occupied until the day of departure.

The Norfolk Island of to-day is so closely associated with that of the past that it is impossible to refer clearly to one without the other. The island, seven miles long by four broad, was discovered by the one and only Captain Cook (five hundred miles east of Lord Howe), on his second voyage in search of the Southern Continent of his dreams in 1774, and was named by him after the Duke of Norfolk.

Not long after his discovery settlers—whalers and the like—began to arrive, but all those who had taken up their abode on the island were evicted when the Imperial Government decided to use it as a penal settlement. Thereafter it was the scene of happenings which for sheer horror can scarcely be surpassed. Under successive governors the convicts—many of whom were political offenders—were treated far worse than beasts. Out here on this isolated rock in the South Pacific there was no one to see, and the governor and his minions had absolute power.

It is impossible to stand to-day on the stone jetty of the boat harbour without conjuring up visions of the poor wretches—whatever their offence—who built it block by block in heavy leg irons and waist-deep surf, with the warder's whiplash for ever hovering over them. To visit the

"Bloody Bridge" where a gang of stonemason convicts took it into their heads to turn the tables on their tormentors, and dashing out their warder's brains on the parapet, tied the body in a sheep-skin and hurled it over the cliffs. To look out at Philip's Island, crimsoning in the sunset, and to think of the hounded criminal who swam the ten miles that separates it from Norfolk, and rather than be captured wrapped his jacket about his head and leapt from the topmost crag on to the rocks below. To hear of men so broken in spirit that they welcomed the gallows, and in many cases blinded themselves with the juice of a herb that grows on the island to escape further torture. To wander amongst the ruins of dark cells, the home of the dreaded "triangle" and solitary confinement, and to ponder on these things at the place of their happening, without something of the sinister past creeping into one's bones.

Norfolk Island has been the home of untold anguish, and her fair face bears the scars to this day.

Time, however, turned a brighter page in the island's history when the Imperial Government presented it as a reserve to the inhabitants of Pitcairn Island, which at that time was considerably over-populated. These people were the descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers, and their story will perhaps bear repetition as one of the most thrilling and extraordinary of real life romances.

In 1760 Captain Bligh was dispatched to Tahiti in the *Bounty*, to collect plants of the bread-fruit tree for transplantation in the West Indies, where it was thought they would supply a staple diet for the natives working on the plantations.

As well as being a stern disciplinarian and a thoroughly able man, Bligh was the victim of an ungovernable temper, and this proved his undoing. The *Bounty* reached Tahiti safely, the plants were shipped and all was made ready for the return voyage when it was found that several members of the crew had succumbed to the fascinations of the place—especially its women —and deserted. For many days the runaway sailors hid in caves about the island with their friends, but were ultimately run to earth by the King of Tahiti, who was anxious to keep in Bligh's good graces.

The deserters were haled on to the fo'castle head, and there soundly thrashed before the eyes of their women. At the time they said nothing, in spite of the frenzied shrieks of the women, who tried to shield the men with their own bodies, but when the *Bounty* was a few days out of Tahiti they mutinied, and the ringleaders — Fletcher Christian, a lieutenant, Young, a midshipman, and M'Coy, Quintal and Adams, seamen—overpowered Bligh and cast him adrift in a twenty-four-foot open boat, together with seventeen others who had shown disinclination to mutiny.

The hardships Bligh and his companions suffered from thirst, hunger, blistering sun, soaking rain and hopeless overcrowding may be imagined. They dare not go back to Tahiti for fear of being murdered by the mutineers, and whenever they chanced to make land the natives descended upon them and drove them off before they could obtain either water or fresh provisions. That they ever reached Timor—six thousand miles distant—is a lasting tribute to the pluck and endurance of Captain Bligh, who preserved strict discipline throughout.

The mutineers returned to Tahiti, but some of them, fearing the consequence of their crime—for one and all imagined Bligh to be dead—collected their women and men friends and set sail in the *Bounty* in search of a more secure hiding-place. This they found on Pitcairn, an uninhabited island to the south-east of Tahiti, and, burning the *Bounty*, they settled down to live in retirement for the rest of their lives.

This might have been possible but for the canker of discontent that seemed to perpetually eat into their ranks. Christian and Young, being officers, naturally took the position of leaders, and some sort of law and order was maintained for a time, but their authority could hardly be expected to last. "Crime levels all ranks," as one insubordinate pertinently remarked. They were all living in the shadow of the gallows, daily dreading the appearance of a ship. Why should

one be accounted superior to another? And so the two officers, whose remorse at the crime they had shared in was naturally more acute than their fellows', found themselves forced to agree to equality and freedom for all.

Here, then, we have a handful of white men each a law unto himself in a land where might is right. Small wonder that the entire community reverted to primeval savagery. The Tahitians who had accompanied them to Pitcairn became slaves, and their white masters little more than unrestrained beasts.

One bond alone held the white men together—the vital necessity of keeping down the Tahitians. But in time the inevitable came to pass: a leader of spirit rose up against them—a woman—and the mutineers of the *Bounty* found *themselves* faced with a mutiny. Casting aside their natural gentleness of nature, the Tahitians were seized with blood-lust, and scoured the island, killing every white man they could lay their hands upon, until only two remained—Adams and Quintal. They escaped and lurked in the bush for days, living on wild fruit, before Quintal, succumbing to the combined effects of drink (made from the fermented juice of the cocoanut palm) and nerve-strain, became a raving madman, and Adams, fearful of his betraying their whereabouts, killed him with an axe.

Adams was at last discovered by the Tahitians in a state of delirium, and spared on that account,

it being the almost universal belief in the South Pacific Islands that a man in such a condition is possessed by a spirit, and therefore "tapu."

This slaughter was followed by a period of comparative peace. The Tahitians returned to their own simple mode of life, and Adams—a wreck of a man, perpetually haunted by remorse and fear—took refuge in religion. He succeeded in converting the Tahitians, and when at last he was discovered by a British warship, such was the admirable state of law and order he had evolved out of chaos on Pitcairn that he was allowed to stay—a feeble old man, working out his own redemption in the few years remaining to him.

In time these half-caste descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers increased to such an extent that their removal to a larger area became a necessity, and in response to a petition the Imperial Government offered them Norfolk Island as a home. A naval lieutenant was sent to transport the islanders, but found some difficulty in persuading them to leave Pitcairn. They were suspicious. He only succeeded by reading aloud to them a proclamation in which Queen Victoria herself was alleged to have given Norfolk Island, and all the houses and stock upon it, to the descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers, to be theirs for all time. And furthermore that—"No other class of person was to be allowed to remain on the island."

So much may be read in the Government

Freckles prepares the *Wanderlust* Salvage for the Auction Sale

The Sale on the Beach

reports of the transaction to-day, and this constitutes the grievance of the *Bounty* people on Norfolk Island at the present time. Losing sight of, or choosing to ignore, the fact that England has long since lost interest in their island and handed it over to the New South Wales Government to manage as it thinks fit, the *Bounty* people stoutly maintain that the island is theirs by right of gift, and that the various officials and private persons who have come to live amongst them are interlopers.

Be this as it may, the New South Wales Government promptly evicted them from their commodious, convict-built houses on the foreshore, and they now live clustered together inland, cherishing bitter resentment against the intruders and hating Australians on principle.

They are all here, the Christians, M'Coys, Quintals, Adamses and the rest, a huge family which, through intermarriage, is steadily degenerating. They are strange folk, a people apart, neither wholly white nor wholly brown in body or mind, poor, indolent, irresponsible, passionate, religious, a study for the ethnologist.

After living in close touch with Adams for two weeks, and accompanying Quintal almost daily to the reef in search of his missing dispatch-case, Freckles found himself no nearer comprehension of either man's enigmatic nature. They profess an immense respect and affection for the English —a sentiment no doubt handed down from father

to son as some atonement for their treatment of Bligh—yet they still commemorate "Bounty Day" with every appearance of pride in the criminal action of their forefathers. Until quite recently they were in the habit of rigging up a quarter deck on the cricket ground, and, each man taking the character of his ancestor, enacted the mutiny of the *Bounty* from beginning to end.

When they first came to Norfolk Island from Pitcairn, fifty years ago, they had never seen a table or a chair, and when they were ushered into their new quarters—solid, convict-built houses once occupied by warders and army officers—they used the very handsome furniture some of them contained for firewood and ate off the floor in true island fashion. Indeed some of them, dwelling among the ruins of the old convict settlement, and refusing to be evicted by interloping officials, live in this manner to-day, while on the hills behind them are other Quintals, Youngs, M'Coys, etc., enjoying all the luxuries of present-day civilisation.

On more than one occasion, while Freckles was sunning himself on the verandah, Quintal, who happens to be related to Adams, dropped in for a chat and a cup of tea, and as the two men sat talking amicably, for the life of him Freckles could not help wondering if either of them ever thought of the past and remembered under what circumstances the great-grandfather of one slew

the great-grandfather of the other with an axe in the heart of the bush on Pitcairn.

Of one thing alone the descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers are convinced—that Queen Victoria herself gave them Norfolk Island, lock, stock and barrel. The belief almost amounts to a religion with them.

"It is wonderful, but true," said Quintal, a fine old gentleman with a snowy beard and bright, bird-like eyes, as he stood on Adams' verandah, looking out over the green, pine-clad slopes of his beloved island; "and what's more, we have papers to prove it. One of these days"—his voice took on an added intensity, and his bird-like eyes gleamed—"one of these days we'll clear the lot of 'em out—the whole lot of 'em." He waved a hand in the direction of the old settlement on the foreshore, where dwelt the doctor, clerk of court, aide-de-camp and policeman, blissfully unconscious of the mandate that had gone forth from the hill-top.

It is doubtful if anywhere in the world such an extraordinary state of affairs exists as on Norfolk Island, and one wonders how long it can go on. Already the island is hopelessly over-stocked. Scarecrows of horses and cows stagger about the roads and fields, vainly searching for a blade of grass. Through intermarriage lunacy and general degeneracy is on the increase. There is no opportunity for the people to make money even if their inherent indolence allowed of the wish to

do so. All they ask is to be left alone on the island Queen Victoria gave them, and even this boon is denied them.

It is as though their Tahitian great-grandmothers bade them dream in the shade of their bread-fruit trees on the one hand, and their mutineer great-grandfathers incited them to eternal rebellion against authority on the other.

Such is the position of the descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers to-day. The curse of Bligh, perhaps. Who can tell?

Entrance to old Convict Settlement, Norfolk Island

The Bloody Bridge, Norfolk Island

XI

FIJI TO-DAY

At the end of two weeks on Norfolk Island the Firm was heartily glad to hear the distant cry of "Ste-eamer" that heralded their release. Climbing a neighbouring hill, they watched a darkening smudge of smoke on the far horizon with all the joy of shipwrecked mariners, and when the steamer anchored a cable's length from the jetty they lost no time in boarding a whale-boat, already deeply laden with oranges, and climbing aboard. The captain had heard of their misfortune and sympathised deeply, but could offer them nothing better in the way of accommodation than the smoking-room cushions for the Spinster, and the trade-room for Freckles and the Nut. The boat was crowded with returning traders from the New Hebrides, and tourist honeymoon couples; moreover, it reeked of copra; but—it was going to Sydney, and Sydney meant a new lease of life to the wanderers.

It was curious, and rather saddening, to stand at the rail of a full-grown steamer, at least twenty feet above water, and look out over the self-same sea that they had fought and conquered in a forty-foot boat. It looked—

and *felt*—so entirely different, yet at intervals the Nut would point out a wave and swear he recognised it.

"There, that one," he would exclaim, while fellow-passengers hurried to the rail expecting at least a whale or a school of porpoises. "It's dirty—and there's a match floating on it. I'm certain it came through the cabin roof and went out through the pump." And no one took the trouble to contradict him.

After once owning a sea-going boat, even with an overhanging counter and various other disadvantages—for particulars of which apply to the Skipper—an ordinary steamer is sheer boredom.

Once more Sydney was welcome—except for the newspaper reporters, who swarmed aboard before the gangway had reached the wharf, and, baling the Firm against the cabin wall, bombarded it with questions. How had it happened? Who was responsible? Was the boat insured? What were the Spinster's impressions? To all of which Freckles gave the prearranged answer: "The captain will give all details." Was it for nothing that the Skipper had spent agonised hours, with his tongue lolling from his mouth and perspiration beading his wrinkled forehead, in an effort to write an account of the disaster and clear himself of blame?

The legions dispersed, only to return to the attack at the hotel a few hours later.

Evidently the Skipper had not only failed to convince with his account of the wreck, but had betrayed the Firm's whereabouts. However, after appeasing the reporters with a "few well-chosen words," and describing the wreck of the *Wanderlust*, with variations, at least twenty times for the benefit of friends who listened with an "I told you so" air, the Firm was suffered to retire to its apartments.

At the evening board meeting it was decided to set out for Fiji on the next day's boat, with an idea of getting on from there into "the milky way of the Pacific" by trader, tramp, or any other means available. The joy of once more being on the move—and in the right direction—almost atoned for the ignominy of having to take a ticket at Cook's. The clerk was exceedingly polite, but also exasperatingly firm. He informed the adventurers, with a bewitching smile and in dulcet tones, that there was a small-pox epidemic in Sydney—what, they had not heard of it?—and that it was necessary to have a certificate showing vaccination within the last three years before it was possible to go anywhere. Vaccination certificates in less than two hours for arms that had not been punctured—at any rate with lymph—for at least fifteen years! How was it to be done? But Sydney is an accommodating place in many respects, and a few moments later Freckles was wrangling with the telephone exchange. Did the man at the other end know of

a doctor, a thoroughly unscrupulous doctor, in or about Sydney? Why, certainly; and a taxi-cab was speeding in his direction before the aggravating smile had faded from the Cook's clerk's face.

See, then, the Firm dashing through the streets of Sydney, alighting at a suburban cottage, entering a tiny "office," and bearing its arms before an unshaven but obliging gentleman in bathroom slippers and a dressing-gown. "Um—ah," was his opinion, and his charge—a guinea.

Cook's clerk smiled afresh when a whirlwind of Firm and vaccination certificates descended upon him, but he issued the tickets and the Fiji boat was boarded two minutes before the gangway sailed into the air.

There followed a peaceful but expectant five days before the fantastic peaks of Suva harbour hove into sight. Freckles had seen them many times before, but could never weary of their grandeur. The Spinster and the Nut were lost in silent wonder and admiration. A gorgeous sunset bathing the still waters of the harbour and the volcanic peaks surrounding it in a delicate pink haze, the insistent boom of surf on a distant reef, the weird cries of the natives scampering about the wharf below with their shocks of lime-bleached hair and white sulus, and over all the mysterious, indefinable charm of the tropics—it was a new world to them, a promising book open at the title-page.

"I really feel that I'm here at last," sighed the

Spinster. "Now I want to see beachcombers, traders, planters, and oh! everything. . . ."

Freckles grinned confidently and led the way towards the gang-plank, bent on airing his Fijian vocabulary on a licensed porter, but a knot of men engaged in lively discussion stopped his progress. He was about to mutter something impatient and elbow a way through them when he caught the one word "war," and almost simultaneously one of the number disengaged himself from the throng and threw up his hands. "Well, well, well," was his greeting, "didn't I say you'd come back?" and almost in the same breath: "We've declared war on Germany."

"That was all the rage when I was out last time," grinned Freckles. "How's copra?"

"Copra be damned," exploded the other, "it's a fact."

And, as all the world knows—it was. Sleepy little Suva rang to the spurred heel of the defender. The rifle clubs in every corner of the group had been called to arms. Recruiting was going on apace, as evidenced by young men hurrying along Victoria Parade with bundles of khaki uniforms on their arms. Barbed-wire entanglements and trenches surrounded the wireless station. The cable—between America and Australia—had been taken over by the authorities; Fijian police, resplendent in fluted sulus and blue tunics with brass buttons, mounted guard with an enhanced air of importance; and strict censorship was

enforced. Only the Governor knew what was going on in the outside world. The rest of Fiji gathered on the beach, at the bar, or the store, and discussed war and rumours of war from daylight to dark.

Fiji had twenty thousand tons of coal in her back yard and was disinclined to part with it to stray German cruisers from Samoa. Moreover, she is never quite sure when the forty-six thousand Indian coolies within her borders will take it into their cunning heads to revolt, and she was taking no chances.

All the world knows how England and her large dominions met the greatest crisis of modern times; perhaps it will be of interest to learn how Fiji—the remotest corner of the Empire—comported herself. In her own small way she was ready.

A volunteer officer was heard to remark in a speech to his troops that "if Germany showed her nose, they would give her something to remember Fiji by," and he meant it, though there was not a permanent fortification or warship in the group. Three Chinamen, peacefully fishing below the wireless station, were imprisoned for the night—presumably as spies. The Firm's cinematograph camera was minutely examined to satisfy the authorities that it contained no "flashlight or signalling device," and Freckles' camera was confiscated. This last calamity was the result of a fell desire on the latter's part to record, by picture as well as story, Fiji's preparedness for

Middleton Reef

Recruiting Headquarters, Suva, Fiji

invasion. The enemy, in a burst of wild extravagance, motored out to the wireless station, and, advancing in open order, brought a 5×4 special sensitive plate to bear on the military encampment and the riot of jungle surrounding it. The sentry grinned broadly and stood at the salute for effect, evidently regarding the incident as a pleasant break in the monotony of routine. Not so, however, the officer in charge, who burst from a tent at the double and demanded what in thunder he meant by allowing such a proceeding.

"You may be the *Governor's secretary* for all I know," he exploded, turning on Freckles with the air of one who has named the limit of human attainment, "but you must hand over that camera."

The chastened Freckles obeyed, with no other comment than that he was *not* the Governor's secretary, but with secret glee in the knowledge that the photograph had been taken on the first film of a fresh spool, and that in his pocket reposed another six pictures illustrating his subject equally well. The most remarkable note in the incident, however, was the sudden transformation in the attitude of the sentry. His naturally amiable and rather bovine expression turned to one of dignified contempt as the enemy retreated in disorder on the waiting car, and when last glimpsed—through a cloud of dust—his rifle was raised at the "present."

Oh, Fiji was taking itself seriously.

Down on Victoria Parade, overlooking the harbour, a gang of coolie convicts was constructing a barricade of coralite boulders and sacks of silt, over which peeped the sleek muzzle of a maxim.

Almost without exception the convicts in Fiji are Indians—the Fijian himself being far too comfortable and indolent to trouble his head and hand with crime—and in almost every case their offence is the same—mutilation or murder of their women-folk. The reason of this is not far to seek. For fear of a too rapid increase of the Indian population in Fiji, the Government allows the introduction of only one woman to every three men. One of these marries the woman and takes in two "lodgers," with the result that before many months have passed natural complications arise. Whether it is the husband or either of the "lodgers" who is aggrieved matters not, the woman suffers the penalty—usually by having her nose sliced from her face, or being murdered outright.

Once the deed is accomplished the Indian accepts the consequences with utter indifference. He has no fear of death, but rather welcomes it. Quite recently five coolies were hanged in Suva gaol simultaneously, and when asked if they had any request to make before departing this world replied :

"Hasten, that we may return to Calcutta."

Yet the Christian fears nothing more than death!

It was with the idea of discovering something of the Indian coolie's outlook on life and condition in Fiji that Freckles sought a local Maharaj and found him in his tiny wooden house on a hill behind Suva. At first he was disinclined to talk; he asked the interpreter who Freckles was, why he wanted to know anything about so humble a member of the community as an Indian, and if he did, why he had singled out Buldi Maharaj as his victim. He was frankly suspicious.

The interpreter played his part as only an Indian can with ten shillings depending on the issue. He began by laying stress on the fact that the "Sahib" was in no way connected with the Government, but a meek, disinterested party who sought the truth and wrote books—strange anomaly. He (the seeker after truth) had been shocked to learn of the treatment of Indians, both by the Fijian Government and their masters on the copra estates, and if the Maharaj would kindly supply a few authentic details the seeker after truth would be obliged, and the case for the Indian labourer in Fiji would be faithfully set forth for the first time in history.

The eyes of Buldi Maharaj gleamed as they rested on the seeker after truth in a penetrating, speculative scrutiny. Freckles tried to look dignified, but not sufficiently so to be taken for a Government official—it was a delicate task. His efforts, however, must have been successful, for presently the Maharaj arose, and, crossing to the

door, carefully shut and locked it. The bare, dark room with its corrugated iron roof that had absorbed the heat of the day was already uncomfortably close; now it was stifling. Also it reeked of that sickly, indescribable smell peculiar to coolie "lines" and any confined space where dark-skinned people congregate. It is said that, to them, whites disseminate much the same odour, and if this is the case they are also to be pitied.

Through the tiny square of window Freckles glimpsed broad-leafed banana plants, and feathery palms reflecting the pink, slanting light of the sunset across Suva harbour. Perhaps it was the appropriate setting, the heavy odour, the beady eyes of the Maharaj across the table that caused Freckles, for the time being, to lose himself in the story that was unfolded, word for word, by the interpreter. At all events he felt that, for the moment he glimpsed—only glimpsed—something of what lies behind the dissembling exterior of the Indian coolie.

"The sahib seeks the truth," he said, resting his skinny elbow on the table and smiling with his mouth, but not his eyes. "He shall have it. He asks how are we recruited? Why do we leave India for Fiji? How are we treated when here? I will tell the sahib how it came about with me, and it is the same with others. I lived with my father at a small village some distance from Meerut. We grew rice and owned three cows. We were Brahmin and contented. Sometimes

we visited relatives and friends in Meerut, and it was here in the bazaar that I met him who first told me of Fiji. He said that he came from there and called on me to witness his well-being. Fiji, he said, was a beautiful place near Gagannath, where money was easily come by and there was no need to work; if I liked he would try and get me there. See, then, the cunning of the man —for I, a Brahmin, was tempted—not on account of money or idleness, but by the mention of the name Gagannath. All India knows this beautiful city and its sacred river. Had not my father told me of it, and had he not striven for years to save enough money to take him there to bathe in the holy waters? And here was one offering to send me to Fiji, which was close by, free of cost. I asked leave to tell my father of this good fortune, but my friend would not allow me. There were so many trying to get to Fiji, he told me, that unless I came alone and at once the opportunity would be lost. How fine it would be, I thought, to return to my father in a little while and tell him that I had bathed in the sacred river at Gagannath! My friend told me that the white man especially was trying to stop the rush to Fiji, and that I must therefore agree readily to all that he said. I was then taken before a magistrate sahib, where I signified my willingness to go by signing papers, and presently, with others, I entered a train, with instructions not to tell anyone where I was going, as there would be such a

rush of people to Fiji that there would be no room for me.

"When we came to Calcutta we were placed in a compound and not allowed to see anyone outside. The agent sahib told us that now we should start for Fiji in a boat—it was a short distance up the coast—close to Gagannath. On hearing we had to take ship, some refused to go, but when the agent sahib pointed out that we had signed papers agreeing to go, and that he would send all of us or none, the timid were overruled. And so we went on a large ship, and day after day passed without our reaching Fiji or Gagannath. They made us work on the ship, and gave us meals which many would not eat, for to do so was to lose caste. Some did not eat for three days, and some died rather than partake of meat.

"After a very long time the ship came to Fiji, and anchored near the island of Nukulau. Many launches and cutters came out, and each man was taken away by the master who had bespoken him to the Government. Husbands and wives were sometimes separated and sent to opposite ends of the group, and there was much crying and wailing.

"As for me, I was taken to a cocoanut estate and made to work for three years. If I was ill they said I was malingering and kicked me. On shipping day, when the steamer came to take the copra, I helped to carry it in sacks from the shed,

and often the overseer sahibs beat me in the face with clenched fists as I staggered under the load. If I ran away I was sent to gaol, and this was better—so I ran away often. I needed a woman and I married one, but soon an overseer sahib noticed her beauty and had me transferred to another island. That is why murders of overseer sahibs occur. And now my time is up. I have served my indenture—but I cannot return to India, for I have lost my caste. And so I live as you see. . . ."

Buldi Maharaj indicated the bare room with a shrug of his skinny shoulders and muttered something inaudible.

"What did he say?" Freckles asked the interpreter.

The latter glanced quickly at the Maharaj, then at the seeker after truth.

"What did he say?" repeated Freckles.

"He says the night is fine for the walk into Suva," replied the interpreter.

"Liar!" thought Freckles, and rose to take his leave.

The Maharaj refused money. It was sufficient, he said, if the sahib set forth what he had been told.

The debt is paid.

So much for the question of the Indian in Fiji, from the Indian point of view. Rightly or wrongly, he is a sorely aggrieved individual, with a copra knife twelve inches long, and there are

forty-six thousand of him—that is all that can be said.

The white man has a different tale to tell. He says that the Indian coolie in Fiji is at once indispensable and a menace. He is necessary as "labour," but after his term of indenture he should be shipped back to India willy-nilly, instead of being allowed to take up land, breed and generally compete with white men. They say that, compared with India, Fiji is a paradise for the coolie, and that the proof of this lies in the fact that when he has served his indenture he rarely returns to his own country. They seem to overlook the fact that in—we will say—seven cases out of ten the Indian is inveigled to Fiji under false pretences, and resents it for the rest of his life. That there are, roughly speaking, four castes in India—the Chatri, soldiers; Brahmin, religious; Bais, tradesmen; and Shudra, servants—and that out of these only the last can wish to remain in Fiji. The rest desire nothing more earnestly than to return to their native land, but fear to do so without their precious caste that has been stolen from them. These remain in Fiji, harbouring bitter resentment, a rapidly spreading canker that some day . . .

There may be those who will wonder why, in notes dealing with Fiji, the Indian coolie receives almost sole attention. It is because the Indian is the problem of Fiji at the present time. The Fijian himself does not count, being a spoilt and

PREPARATIONS FOR INVASION: COOLIE CONVICTS BUILDING BARRICADES ON VICTORIA PARADE, SUVA

THE FIJI MENACE. (HOUSES MADE OF KEROSENE TINS)

indolent child, bereft of most of his old-time creeds and customs, and drifting slowly but surely towards extinction through the encroachment of a civilisation that was never intended for him.

XII

THE FIRM DISPERSES

WAR! Lying at length in cane chairs on the balcony of MacDonald's Hotel, looking out across Victoria Parade and the moonlit quietude of Suva harbour, it seemed incredible that more than half Europe was engaged in slaughter.

Like all Britishers the world over, the Firm was stunned by the news. Matters that a few hours ago had seemed of supreme importance faded into insignificance beside this monster happening. A tour of the South Sea Islands forsooth! What was it but a mere philandering? Freckles and the Nut could think and talk of nothing else. Even the Spinster's practical mind failed to grapple with its customary details, and there followed a marked hiatus in the production of sofa cushion covers. Most of the evening was spent in hurrying to and from the post office, where at short intervals royal proclamations were posted, setting forth the proper conduct of British subjects in time of war.

"That settles it," snapped the Nut, turning from the perusal of one of these. "We must lend no more money to Germans."

"I don't remember ever having done so myself," said Freckles.

"Nor I," grinned the Nut; "but don't forget it—that's all."

He produced his remaining wealth—a five-pound note and some silver—studied it gravely, and thrust it deep into his pocket with the air of one who has already helped to foil the enemy.

It was something of a problem to contemplate. Fiji is full of Germans—traders for the most part—and very good fellows some of them are. What would they do?—or, rather, what would be done with them? The situation was made still more awkward by the facts that they are old inhabitants in a cosmopolitan community, where nationality counts for little, and everyone knows everyone else like a brother, and that they are for the most part strongly anti-Kaiser themselves, as is the case wherever one finds Germans in British dominions.

What they would do was soon made manifest by a German storekeeper in Suva, who, from sheer dejection at the prospect of war, drowned his misery in alcohol and paraded the streets with a Union Jack in his hat, singing "Rule, Britannia." Another bought a coloured print of the Kaiser for the sheer pleasure of hurling stones through it in the public thoroughfare. Was it a pose? Perhaps. In any case war makes no distinctions, and he and his compatriots throughout the group were placed under surveillance by those who

a few hours before had treated them as boon companions.

One other instance may be cited to illustrate the transforming influence of war. A mild-mannered individual was drinking at a Suva bar when a German—evidently a new arrival in Fiji—was heard to remark that if the Fatherland was fighting he was sorry, but he must go and fight also.

"Agreed," said the mild-mannered one, removing his duck jacket, "but why go to the Fatherland?" The German was carried outside to regain consciousness.

The next morning the Firm discovered that, as far as reaching their elusive "Islands" was concerned, Suva was little better than a *cul-de-sac*. The war had temporarily paralysed sea traffic, and none of the regular steamers were running. The shipping offices knew nothing—except that the boat which had brought the Firm to Fiji was supposed to return to Sydney in three days' time; and this, in the end, they were forced to take or remain in Suva indefinitely.

Back to Sydney! Once more the "Heads," the stately passage down the harbour fairway, the scurry of city life. It was as if Fate stood with uplifted hand to check the Firm's progress at every turn.

On the morning of departure Suva awoke to find a French cruiser in her midst. How magnificent she looked by the clear light of a tropical

dawn, lying inert, yet sinister, on the glassy surface of the harbour! No one knew why she was there or whither she was bound—until a week later, when it was learnt that German Samoa had surrendered without firing a shot. The officers paid an official visit on the Governor; the Governor returned it to the accompaniment of booming guns, and when, at noon, the Sydney steamer made to pass her close, with wildly cheering passengers lining the rail, the warship moved also—like some gigantic grey rock suddenly imbued with life. An answering cheer came from her decks, and a band burst forth into the "Marseillaise" and "Rule, Britannia." It was an inspiring spectacle, and one that had the strange but universal effect of causing a lump to rise in the throat and a dimness cloud the eye.

She escorted the Sydney steamer a mile outside the harbour, then slowly drew astern, fading at last into a dim smoke smudge on the far horizon. Her sealed orders had been opened.

More uneventful days of steaming through calm blue waters, to the accompaniment of smoke-room war talk and meal bugles, and then, one evening —Middleton Reef! It was worth seeing. Anything more desolate and sinister than this gigantic horseshoe of coral out in the open sea, a menace to every storm-driven ship in a radius of a hundred miles, it would be difficult to imagine. Some day, perhaps, it will be an island, as fair as any in the South Pacific, but at present the

wonderful little coral polyp has not finished its work, and Middleton Reef constitutes a death-trap. A white circle of breakers, clear cut against the blue of deep waters outside, and the opalescent green of the lagoon within, and here and there perched on the reef's jagged teeth, like marine scarecrows, wrecks in every stage of dissolution.

At the time of the Firm's passing there were five, and never a year goes by without adding to their number.

For some time a provision boat was anchored in the lagoon for the benefit of the shipwrecked, but some pirate without heart or conscience stole boat and provisions. Since then steamers going to and from Fiji are bound to pass close enough for observation.

Grim stories attach to these wrecks. One, a Norwegian barque, still in fair preservation and now used as a provision ship, voluntarily entered the horseshoe of coral to shelter from a storm and rode it out safely anchored in the lagoon. It was when making for the supposed exit that disaster befell her, and she struck a reef, tearing out her bottom. All might have still been well with her crew but for the provisions which had sunk to the coral bed in a couple of fathoms of water. The starving crew could see them—tins of meat and ship's biscuits—but few of their number could swim, and the place was infested with sharks. The skipper, who had his wife and child aboard, was the first to make an attempt to reach

Typical Bush Road in Pineapple District of Queensland

A Pineapple Farm

the food. There was never another. The terrified wife, watching at the rail, saw her husband dive into the transparent depths, saw him grasp a tin of biscuits, and saw—crimson waters swirling below her, out of which rose a dismembered leg in a seaman's boot.

No one else dared to dive, and in a frenzy of starvation the crew threatened the woman's child. It was enough; the demented woman flung her daughter overboard and plunged after her.

The crew was ultimately picked up in an unconscious condition by a steamer of the Fijian line, but—on its return voyage. On the outward journey it had passed within a mile of Middleton Reef and seen nothing of them.

The prospect of again returning to Sydney without having accomplished a single item of its programme was sufficiently depressing to subdue the Firm into a grim acceptance of the worst. What was to be done? The question was even harder to answer when, on landing, they were informed at the bank that "at the present moment it was quite impossible to cable money to or from England."

In stony silence the Firm filed from the bank to their hotel and held a board meeting.

"We're stranded," said Freckles.

"Exactly," agreed the Nut.

"We shall have to do *something*," piped the Spinster.

"Then we can look upon the Firm as disbanded," continued Freckles. "It is now a case of every man for himself. I propose that we adjourn, do a little hard thinking, and communicate our separate ideas at dinner."

The motion was carried unanimously, and the Firm dissolved into the streets.

All Sydney was buying special war editions of the newspapers and blocking the pavements while they read contradictions or repetitions of the previous day's news. Half-way down George Street a German band—a *German* band was braying the "Marseillaise" and "Rule, Britannia." Each musician wore a Union Jack in his cap, and, gazing over his instrument at the passers-by with meek apprehension, blew for his very life. It was reminiscent of the snake-charmer who is bitten if his music ceases. Freckles tried to imagine an English band being allowed the same licence in Germany at the moment, but failed. Again, an encampment for Germans was established outside Sydney, and not only were they supplied with free rations, but an allowance of one shilling a day for tobacco and incidental expenses. All this while English non-combatants were being prodded through German streets with the bayonet as entertainment for the townsfolk. Surely forbearance can be carried too far.

It did not take Freckles long to decide his course of action. He had a pine-apple farm in Queensland, and must visit it some time or

other; why not now, and wring sufficient money from the manager to take the Firm home? He said as much to his companions that evening at dinner, but met with unexpected opposition.

"I rather want to see what work is like in Australia," said the Spinster. "I'm going to get a job."

"Oh, this is great," beamed the Nut. "What's your fancy, Spinster?"

"Barmaid, companion, housemaid, anything that turns up," she answered. "There are employment offices all along Elizabeth Street."

"You'll hate it," ventured Freckles.

"Perhaps," admitted the Spinster; "we'll see."

There was never any more to be said when the Spinster voiced her "we'll see," so attention was diverted to the Nut. Under the stress of two pairs of inquiring eyes he helped himself to curried crayfish with studied nonchalance.

"Captain to you," he grinned at last. "I've joined the Australian Expeditionary Force."

"This afternoon?"

"Yes. Any objection? It was like this. I trapsed at the double through the camp at Ranwick for two hours, saluting all sorts of weird people and asking them if they were Colonel ——. They were not. But at last I found him—dear old bird. Directly I told him I'd been in the ——s for three years, he opened his arms and as much as said, 'Thank God.'

They tested me in drill—which, by the way, came back to me like a miracle, and before you could say knife they had promised me my company. We're in a terrible state at present, but three weeks ought to see us straight. . . ."

"Waiter," said Freckles, "a bottle of Chablis."

The occasion was fittingly celebrated, and in the morning the Spinster set out on her tour of the Sydney employment agencies, the Nut returned to his company, and Freckles took train for his pine-apple farm. For the first time in six months the Firm was scattered to the four winds of heaven.

Some time ago Freckles made mention of this same pine-apple farm in other travel notes,[1] and he has been dogged by letters of inquiry on and off ever since. It was impossible to answer all of them at the time, but as a good deal of interest seems to have been shown in the industry, perhaps a short description of it will not be out of place in the present instance. Come, then, rebellious city clerks, younger sons, and all such as have small capital and smaller prospects, and learn where and how you may become independent with a minimum of risk to your "little all." For this is one of the main charms of pine-apple growing. There are other occupations in Australia with greater possibilities of acquiring large and quick returns, but most of them require considerable capital, and depend, to a great

[1] *The Confessions of a Tenderfoot.*

extent, on the Goddess Fortune, who is even more fickle in Australia than elsewhere. In pine-apple growing chance plays no part. If a man have health, energy and application, he is sure of a fair, steady return for his labour and capital, year in, year out. There is no disease known to the fruit, neither drought nor rain affects it, being of the cactus family and living to a great extent on air, and the market is inexhaustible.

It must be admitted that the foregoing sounds uncommonly like an excerpt from a Government leaflet, but the city clerk and younger son, for whose benefit it is written, may rest assured that it is nothing of the sort, but merely the attempt of a disinterested party to pass along a good thing which he stumbled upon after two years' weary wandering in search of an investment for small capital.

Ask nine people out of ten how pine-apples grow, and they will either stare at you blankly, or murmur something about "trees in the West Indies or Singapore"; yet in Queensland there are Englishmen engaged in this snug little industry, making anything from 30 per cent. to 50 per cent. per annum on money and labour invested.

Why then, you may ask, has it not been taken up by large companies, and exploited like rubber or tea? The answer is not far to seek. Pine-apples need very special soil, and there is not enough of it to run things on a sufficiently large

scale to pay an army of shareholders. Moreover, labour is scarce and expensive, one shilling an hour per eight-hour day being the rate of pay; consequently the industry remains secure in the hands of the small-holder.

As to location: There are, roughly, three districts in Australia where the pine-apple thrives, and all of them are scattered along the east coast of Queensland, from Cairns to fifty or sixty miles south of Brisbane. But more depends on choice of longitude than new-comers realise. If the land taken up be too far north—that is, too near the tropics—although a prolific crop of the most delicious pines results, the fruit ripens too quickly, and will not "carry" to the Australian markets in Sydney and Melbourne, where for three months of the year it realises as much as one shilling a pine. It can, of course, be tinned, but even then it lacks the firm, crisp quality of the best preserved pine-apple. On the other hand, if the land is too far south, the grower has to contend with frost, which necessitates covering the plants with straw at night—a herculean task, and must be content with a comparatively meagre crop. The best location then may be said to lie midway between the two, where frost and tropical heat are equally unknown, and this is to be found in the Blackall Range, sixty miles north of Brisbane. Here is a truly beautiful country of rolling hills, hazy blue distances and semi-tropical bush.

Slicing, Paring and Coring for Canning

The Boilers

To clear and plant such land will cost the owner forty-five pounds an acre, and he is a wise man who lets out such work on contract to those who are thoroughly used to it. Many a new-comer, in an access of eagerness and energy, has tackled it himself, and discovered that at the end of a year's Gargantuan labour the few acres he has cleared have cost him more than the contract price, apart from having reduced him to skin and bone. Far better had he spent the time in working on a neighbouring plantation for the very respectable wage of a shilling an hour, and incidentally picked up invaluable wrinkles on cultivation.

From start to finish the procedure for creating a pine-apple plantation out of virgin bush is as follows :—All standing timber is felled, and this is no mean task when the axe is opposed to such surfaces as blackbutt, tallow wood, box, ironbush and bloodwood. In June—following a long spell of dry weather—this is burnt in one gigantic fire that flames and smoulders for upwards of a month. Holes are then dug under the remaining roots—the butts of which often measure twenty feet in circumference—and six sticks of gelatine and dynamite are inserted. A detonator is then pressed home into one of the sticks—a ticklish undertaking—and the whole firmly plugged into the earth with damp clay. A coil is carried a hundred feet distant, a current flashed along it from an electric battery, and, with a deafening

roar, the stump flies in splinters a hundred feet in the air. This is repeated until the land is fit for the plough. Suckers—or shoots from the pine-apple plant, which cost four pounds a thousand—are then planted in double rows, thirty feet apart, on the hill-sides in such a way as to allow of free drainage, and the planter waits two years, occupying himself with fencing, weeding and building his future home. At the end of this time he gathers his first crop, and thenceforward he continues so to do four times a year for thirteen years without replanting.

At present, and for six months in the year, fresh pine-apples fetch as high a price in the Australian markets as they do in London, so there is no object in attempting to ship to England. But during the remaining six months they are so plentiful that a glut usually ensues, and the wise man takes the opportunity of canning. This is an extremely simple process, and converts a comparative loss into a substantial gain. The pine-apple is cleanly pared, cored and sliced, and placed in a tin containing two ounces of sugar. The tin is then filled with water, its lid, with a small vent hole, clamped home and immersed in boiling water for ten minutes. A further quarter of an hour with the vent hole soldered completes the process, and when attractively labelled the canned Queensland pine-apple is fit to take its place in any market of the world.

The case for pine-apple growing in Queensland may be summed up in a few words.

Price of bush-land suitable to pine-apples . .	£15	0	0	per acre
Cost of clearing and planting one acre . .	45	0	0	,,
	£60	0	0	
Minimum net return per acre per year for thirteen years without replanting .	£40	0	0	

This may sound a trifle too good to be true. It can only be said that the foregoing facts and figures are the result of five years' experience, and are given by a younger son out of sympathy for younger sons in an age when it becomes increasingly difficult for them to know what to do, and where to do it.

XIII

THE LETTERS OF THE SPINSTER AND THE NUT

It was while on his pine-apple farm in Queensland that Freckles received the following letters, and as each in its way throws light on the particular phase of Australian life it deals with, it may be as well to reproduce them here.

Hearken then to the Spinster, ye adventurous maids who contemplate seeking employment under the Southern Cross :

The Blue Mountains.

Dear Freckles,—You asked me to let you know how the world wags for the immigrant girl in search of work in Australia. I give you my own experiences for what they are worth.

I spent three solid days tramping round the registry offices and seeing prospective employers in answer to alluring advertisements. Here is a sample :

Wanted.—Compble help, bright, small adult family. 20/-, west ; Cook, temp., go to country for one month, 22/6, interv. 11.30 a.m. H'maid, 18/-, pr. house, subs. ; Cook, little lndry, 25/-, subs., interv. 2.30 p.m. Two Frs. as H'maid and

Blowing out Stumps to clear Land. The Explosion

P'maid. Edc., Prot.; H'maid, 15/-, boys' coll., Moss Vale. Miss —— (over Cohen's, Tailor).

"Double Dutch," you say? Not at all. To *us*, the initiated, Comple. means companionable; yng., young; subs., suburbs; Frs., friends; Prot., Protestant. It is our code. Advertisements in the Sydney papers are paid for by the line, hence the abbreviations. I leave you to decipher the rest for yourself.

For the most part my hunt for work was intensely amusing, but I found myself being constantly reminded of my "place." This came as rather a surprise, as I had always understood that in the Colonies servants were treated *à la Duchesse*. However, perhaps this treatment was due to my notoriously dignified exterior, and was deserved.

One advertisement rather caught my fancy:

Wanted.—Refined young ladies for chorus work or marching on.

I found the address after wandering about for nearly two hours, and it proved to be a small private house in a back street of a "sub." (to use the vernacular). I was asked to await Mr ——'s pleasure in the kitchen, as he was engaged for the moment. This I did in the company of two other "refined young ladies," who both talked at once and flooded me with information about their

previous experiences on the boards and their many conquests. I tried to look impressed, but am afraid I only succeeded in appearing incredulous, as one was at least six feet tall, wide in proportion and wore spectacles. Australian women do run to beef. The other appeared to be of much the same build, but when she rose to meet Mr ——, who bowed her into a side room, she gave one the impression of "getting down" from her chair. She was all body and no legs. On the whole, by the samples, it seemed to me I stood a chance.

When my turn came I confess to feeling nervous, for I dreaded a "voice trial" with all my old "green inside" sensation. However, Mr —— informed me it was "Bioscope Statuary" he went in for, and he wanted a young lady to portray Venus, as his wife—who up to that time had posed for the part—wished to give all her time to musical studies. I wondered at the time if he troubled to explain all this to every applicant, and inquired—without, I hope, turning a hair—if it meant studies in the nude. He replied that "silk all-over tights and a trifle of chiffon" was the required costume, and produced a photograph of a portly lady clad in this way; but in addition she wore high-heeled shoes and apparently very tight corsets. The result was repulsive—at any rate from a Spinster's point of view. I gazed at it admiringly and commented upon the beauty of the pose, etc., but added that I was not the correct

build for such a character. Mr —— was good enough to differ from me, and asked if he might take my measurements. *That* was why a tape measure had adorned his neck throughout the interview! No, my "detailed mind" had not missed it, but it had puzzled me up to that moment. He requested me to hold my skirt tightly round me, and the measuring began. He must have felt me shaking, for he told me not to be nervous; perhaps it was as well that he never guessed the cause was laughter. He discovered that my hips and thighs were sadly wanting, and politely bowed me out, apologising for my own shortcomings. I have wondered since what it was all about.

I thought after that I had better not try for an ornamental "job," but confine myself to strict utility. I nearly took a place as maid-companion to an old lady of ninety-three, but when I heard that I should have to share the same bed, hard up as I was, I refused it. Then I applied for a position as "lady-housekeeper to a business gentleman with one daughter." Now I find that the work of a housekeeper out here is very different to that at home, even when prefixed by the word "lady." I interviewed the gentleman in his city office, and he was quite willing to take me without references, but when he told me the duties I quailed. I was supposed to do the entire work of an eight-roomed house, cook, wash and superintend the musical and French studies of

his ten-year-old daughter, and all for 15/- a week. So one has to pay heavily for the title "lady" in Australia, for an ordinary housekeeper or "general" receives 20/- or 25/- a week, minus the French and music. I often wonder if the "business gentleman" has found his paragon.

Funds were really running very low, and determined to see the thing out and not show the white feather by applying to you, as you suggested, I made up my mind to take any employment that offered at £1 a week. I applied for a parlour-maid's place, which was advertised on a black-board outside one of those funny little registry offices in Elizabeth Street. There seem to be myriads of them, each smaller than the other, but the amount of work done in them would surprise you, and they must make a pretty penny, for their charge is an amount equal to one half of the applicant's first week's wages, both from the employer and the employee.

At the particular office I visited nine individuals, male and female, applied for positions of one kind or another within a quarter of an hour.

One youth who sat next to me, while waiting his turn, informed me that the war had thrown him out of his last job—a carpenter's—and that he was now applying for a kitchenman's post. Of course we talked "war," and I was amazed when he told me that the Japanese could not possibly take advantage of the existing state of affairs to invade Australia, as their fleet would

have to come through the English Channel to reach Australian waters, and would promptly be annihilated there! So much for the Australian man-in-the-street's hazy ideas of invasion.

My turn came at last, and the good lady of the registry office heard my requirements, and informed me that I ought to get a place as parlour-maid as I had "a good appearance," but she was afraid that "no references" would stand in my way to a really first-class "place." It did; and this in a country where I thought everyone was taken on his merits, and allowed to prove his worth, and all sorts of delightful things. On the telephone (behind a screen) I heard myself being recommended as "quite a superior person, thoroughly understanding my duties and speaking in a refined manner." However, the lady at the other end remained unimpressed, and I found myself again in Elizabeth Street, jobless and very nearly moneyless.

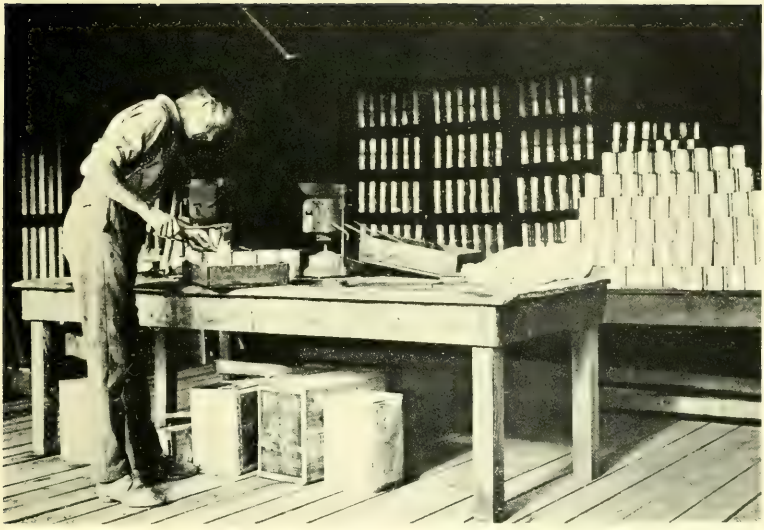
The next agent—a man—alone, and evidently finding time hanging heavily on his hands, took me by the shoulders, thrust his face within two inches of mine, and said impressively: "My dear girl, you're not strong enough!" As his face continued to approach I leant backwards until I thought my spine would snap, and finding it—the face—still approaching, I broke and fled.

Once more the pavement of Elizabeth Street; but in spite of all the set-backs and disappointments I could not help feeling that this mode of

finding employment was infinitely preferable to the way in which an immigrant girl is pitchforked willy-nilly into a situation—and expected to keep it—without any say in the matter.

Perhaps you are tired of all these details, so I may as well tell you that I succeeded in the end and am now waitress at the —— Hotel, ——, Blue Mountains, a tourist and health resort about sixty miles out of Sydney. I receive £1 a week, and earn it. You know I am no slacker, but this is appalling. I wake to the sound of the alarum at 6 A.M., and have to be down by 6.20. I sweep and dust five sitting-rooms, lay my breakfast-tables, wait at the meal, wash up everything, get 11 o'c. tea (an Australian institution), wash up, lay tables for midday dinner and wait, wash up. Get afternoon tea, wash up. Lay meat tea and wait, wash up. All this may sound easy, and would be, if it were not for the mangling on Monday afternoon, ironing on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and cleaning silver on Friday and Saturday afternoons. If I have to do this sort of thing for long I shall certainly leave, as the housemaid, whose name is Daisy (pronounced, D*i*sy by everyone here), assures me that I am being "put upon." I was engaged as *waitress*, not housemaid-laundress. Intrigue belowstairs!

"Disy" is such a pretty girl and really a very good sort; it is as well the Nut is not in the vicinity or he would never leave the Blue Mountains. It is a pity that she ever has to open her



Soldering the Cans

Exit the Nut

mouth, for then her lovely eyes and pretty, straight nose are forgotten in her awful accent and false teeth. These seem to me the chief failings of Australian women. Heaven knows where the accent comes from, but there it is in every one of them. It is really virulent Cockney with a slight touch of Lancashire. And the teeth —or, rather, lack of them! *They* put it down to absence of lime in the drinking-water—but I have an idea that it is the result of over-indulgence in "lollies" (Australian for sweets) just as in America.

You can imagine my consternation when, on arriving at this "place"—with my heart in my mouth—the proprietress informed me that I was to have a bedroom mate. That side of things had never presented itself to me. As you know, I would rather have a dustbin to myself than share a bedroom with the Queen; and it is very lucky for me that "Disy" is a nice girl. Her great drawback is that when we turn in I am dog-tired and tumble into bed as soon as possible. But she, poor girl, suffers terribly from bunions and corns—on her toes, between her toes, and on the soles of her feet, to be explicit. These, and detailed accounts of her "boys," who seem to be legion, keep me awake till all hours. She sits on the edge of her bed, soaking her feet in hot water and lysol, and then makes a detailed inspection of them, occasionally hopping over to my bed to show me the mutilated toes, or the place

she means to operate upon. She has no other topics of conversation than "corns" and "boys"; yet with it all she amuses me, she is so bright and cheerful.

The little Japanese chef is rather a thorn in my side.

I resent being ordered about by a coloured man, especially when he looks like a "Liberty" doll in a chef's cap and apron. He very often tells me to do things that are really his work, and it is all I can do not to say: "Do it yourself, and be d——d to you!" The Japs carry their assurance wherever they go.

Old Humphrey is the last of this extraordinary *ménage*. He has certainly seen "better days," and talks intelligently—when sober. He knows London well, and, poor old chap! he is so pleased to have someone to talk over his old home with that he haunts me on every possible occasion. He comes and leans against my pantry door while I am washing up, and breathes stale whisky at me while he maunders on about the positions he used to occupy. He usually ends up with: "I know I'm an old fool, but I also know that I am drunk, and it's very few who know when they are." This knowledge is apparently the one thing left that he is proud of. Poor old Humphrey! I have told him to come and see me if he ever returns to the old country, and he has promised to do so.

At last I have been offered drinks! Yesterday

a gentleman ordered some beer, so I had to go to the bar for it and take the money with the order. The barman offered me anything I liked to name. I had neither the time nor the inclination. I may as well add that my predecessor was dismissed for being too intimate with this individual. I am afraid I'm a sad disappointment to him. His wife, who occasionally relieves him at the bar, also offered me a " nip " the other day. I notice that these invitations, when extended to a woman, are always offered in an awed whisper, though why I have never been able to fathom.

I will write again soon ; meanwhile why don't you let me know how you are faring ? I have not heard a word from either you or the Nut. Letters would be welcomed just now by

THE SPINSTER.

DEAR FRECKLES,—Your letter came as a ray of hope to me, for, truth to tell, and in spite of bringing down upon my head the Nut's jeer of " funk ! " I am very tired of this, and was wondering how much longer I could hold on. How I pity the poor immigrant girl who *has* to go on with it indefinitely. I always had a great sympathy for servants ; now it has increased—that's all. Of course they are used to it ; possibly they have never known anything else, but I always thought this a weak argument for keeping a bird in a cage.

It is wonderfully inspiriting to think that we

shall soon be on the " briny " once more, though not in our dear little *Wanderlust.* I have given notice, and my " missus " seems sorry to lose me, which is something. " Disy " envies me going to England, and when I told her I was leaving she said: " You're a real smart girl, and we've worked well together; we've been real good pals, haven't we ? " Also something.

There was a dance the other night in aid of the Red Cross Fund, and as it was, I hear, a typical Australian function, I must tell you about it. All sorts of costumes were worn, from skin-tight evening gowns to badly cut coats and skirts. I was introduced to a little Englishwoman, an assistant in the village store, as being my compatriot. Amongst all the lingoes I have heard lately nothing has reached the climax of this lady's Cockney accent. No wonder, when Australians are reminded of their accent by British people, they protest that there are far worse accents at home. She pointed out to me all the celebrities. The most striking amongst them was the village idiot, who took a violent fancy to me and shadowed me everywhere. His one phrase was: " I beg pardon." He was immensely tall and thin, and looked as if he might drop to pieces at any moment; also he had pink eyelids and huge red hands; he wore white duck trousers and a sort of frock coat without waistcoat, collar, or tie. When he asked me to dance, by opening his arms wide

The Ruins of Papette, Tahiti, after Bombardment

The Club, Papeete

and swaying in front of me, I declined with thanks.

All the funny, old-fashioned dances were in vogue there: quadrille, valeta, barn dance and polka. There were three or four terrible musical items—one, a duet. The man was hardly five feet, but immensely stout and had a stentorian bass voice. The woman was—for once—very tall and thin, and stood so immovably upright that she could not take sufficiently deep breaths to last through the phrases, and ran short at the end of each—which started *forte* and faded away into nothing. Perhaps this was intended for feeling. Incidentally, she was the woman who did the hotel washing.

If only you had been there to laugh with me I should have been saved much internal pain, as I became hysterical towards the end of the evening with having to suppress my merriment.

I have not told you that I now receive "tips" without flinching; indeed I expect them, and am disappointed when they are not forthcoming. This, after receiving the shock of my life the first time! Honeymoon couples are the most promising.

A little Frenchwoman nearly made me weep at my own misfortune the other day. She was late to dinner and I remained in the dining-room to wait on her. She began by asking me my name and how I liked my work, so I told her of our wreck and other misfortunes. She stroked my

hand and called me "poor dear chile," and told me that brighter days were coming, though how she knew I can't imagine. She asked me what my mother would think if she knew I were earning my own living. I said I was sure she would be horrified, and the little lady said: "Ah! I know those English mothers!"

The news of my exit has evidently leaked out in the hotel, as I am receiving little parting gifts in place of tips from many of the guests. They have been most kind to me.

My "missus" has just been in to pay me my wages. I presume she didn't want me to go away with the impression that I was indispensable to her, for she shook hands most kindly, and said: "Well, Spinster, I must thank you for all you have done, or at least—all that you have *tried* to do." A cheerful farewell, *n'est ce pas?*

Ho! for the briny and even deck quoits and beef-tea. "Funk" if you like, but I am yours,

THE WEARY SPINSTER.

P.S.—I forgot to give my impressions from the immigrant girl's point of view, and that is really, I suppose, what you want. Well, it seems to me that on the whole Australia is a good place for her to come to. As a servant she will have far more independence out here, higher wages, harder and more varied work, and an infinitely better chance of marrying someone with money. I mention this last consideration because, from what I

learned of immigrant girls on the *Borax*, it is the most important. T. S.

THE CAMP,
RANDWICK.

DEAR FRECKLES,—Whew ! is all I have to say. This game of making soldiers out of unruly navvies is slowly killing me. I think I told you that they have come to consider me rather a clever fellow in these parts, and have consequently given me my company. I feel that the material is here, but—well, it takes a power of working up. Here is my programme from 6 A.M. until 9 P.M.: Parade, Breakfast, Parade, Lunch, Parade, Lectures, Dinner, Night Work, Bed.

There was nearly trouble the other day, as none of the men have yet received a penny of their pay, much less the officers. It was averted, but the lack of discipline is simply appalling. It is all you can do to get a man to salute, and they refuse point-blank to take the slightest notice of their own cadet officers. They look upon them as children—which, by the way, most of them are.

For a sample of the Australian military method, what price this ? I was standing outside my tent, pondering on a line of untidy mess-boxes, when I received a dig in the ribs and a jocular voice inquired :

" How about a bit of leave, governor ? "

He was one of my own company, too. I explained that I treated my superior officer's

uniform with respect and expected the men of my company to do the same, but it was like talking to a Cheshire cat, he merely grinned. Another man laughed outright on parade. For the minute I was flummoxed, then ordered him to fall out and continue laughing for one minute. I'm glad to say he had the grace to feel a fool, and returned to the lines completely sobered.

Things are in such an infernal muddle that it is no good attempting to treat indiscipline in the proper way; you have to tackle it yourself on the spot and as you can. A lot of it is brought about by familiarity on the part of the Australian officers. A certain amount of sympathy with one's men is, of course, necessary, but when an officer alternately swears at them, and calls them "old boys," there is going to be trouble.

One thing they all heartily dread, and that is Aldershot. They know they're in for a hard time, and nothing could be better for them.

Everything is vague, but at present it seems probable that we sail—in twenty-two transports, and escorted by Japanese warships—in a week's time.

The material is there, but—I must get on with it. Yours ever,

THE NUT.

XIV

THE CLIMAX

With what high hopes the Spinster and Freckles set out for home via the Society Islands (French), San Francisco and New York may well be imagined. Tahiti, the gem of the South Pacific, would afford at least a glimpse of the islands they had come so far, and striven so hard, to see.

"Don't talk about it," said the Spinster, as the steamer forged through calm blue seas, under the fairest of fair weather skies. "Something is sure to happen; I can feel it in my bones."

Freckles admitted that ill fortune was a consistent jade, but when the volcanic minarets of Mourea hove in sight it seemed that the sad remnants of the Firm had cheated her at last.

The enchanted isle of a fairy tale if ever there was one, this Mourea. Range upon range of cloud-capped, volcanic peaks, razor-edged, needle-pointed, stretching away inland as far as the eye can trace, and at their base mysterious, verdant valleys clothed in purple mist. To see Mourea is to set the heart of the adventurer aching with desire. Freckles and the Spinster stood on the fo'castle head, wide-eyed and silent

with anticipation. What peaks to conquer, what valleys to explore!

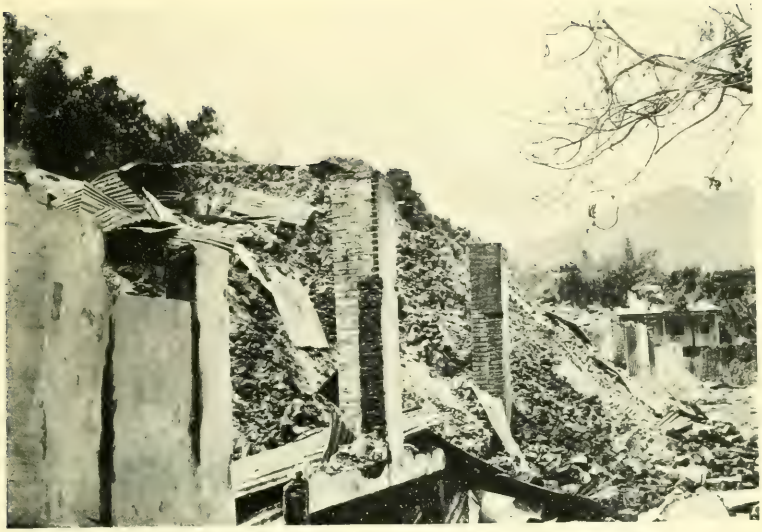
They turned to find the green slopes of Tahiti on the starboard bow and at their feet a cluster of white buildings—Papeete—glittering in the sunset glow. One thing, however, attracted the eye before all others—a pillar of yellow flame, seemingly in the very heart of the town. The knot of passengers at the ship's rail was at a loss to account for it. Was Papeete burning her rubbish in the main thoroughfare on a steamer day? Impossible. Was it a building on fire? Equally impossible, for through the binoculars it was evident that no one was taking the slightest notice of it. The customary multi-coloured figures of an island beach strolled leisurely, cycled, or drove about it with the utmost unconcern.

"The Germans!" suggested some inspired genius. Exactly what he meant no one troubled to inquire, but a general laugh followed the remark.

"I tell you it's the Germans," he repeated excitedly, with the binoculars riveted to his eyes. "I can see houses in ruins and—and—smoke——"

A strained silence fell on the little group. Men stared at one another with set faces; women instinctively drew together.

"Dog sausages from now on," remarked the inevitable humorist, and the tension was relieved.



Two thousand Tons of Coal burning by Day

By Night

Everyone laughed and talked at once, belief and incredulity struggling for mastery.

All doubt was put at rest, however, by the arrival of a launchful of khaki-clad French soldiers, who clambered aboard and mixed freely with the passengers. It was a fact. At six o'clock on the 22nd of September Papeete sighted two cruisers and a merchantman approaching from the south-west. They flew no colours, and when half-a-mile from the passage in the barrier reef the earthwork fort on the hill-side fired across their bows with the one six-pounder it possessed. Evidently fearing mines in the reef channel, the cruisers approached no nearer, but, describing a figure of eight, hauled up the German flag and opened fire. One hundred shots they launched at the fort, tearing the hill-side into ribbons, but failing to touch the six-pounder or the fortifications that guarded it. They then turned their attention to the *Zélée*, a small obsolete gunboat flying the French flag, and guarding a German merchantman she had captured a few days before. It took twenty shots to sink the *Zélée*, and long after she had disappeared beneath the surface shells continued to whistle overhead, or burst along the sea front, mowing a clear avenue of demolition through Papeete.

Realising that the Germans were probably after coal, the French poured kerosene over the two thousand tons stored in their naval yard, and set it alight. This was the yellow flame that had

been sighted from the steamer. And so, amidst bursting shells, toppling buildings, and scenes of the wildest confusion, the inhabitants fled to the hills behind the town—scurrying natives, methodically trotting Chinamen with their worldly belongings in baskets suspended from a bamboo across their shoulders, a sprinkling of "nature men" (a sect in Tahiti believing, amongst other things, in nudity), and a few white non-combatants—while the French soldiers, two hundred strong, and with sixteen motor cars mounted with quick-firers, prepared to resist a landing-party "to the death." But none put in an appearance. Apparently satisfied with the damage they had done, and still fearing mines in the reef channel (which, by the way, did not exist), the cruisers ceased fire and steamed away north-east, leaving Papeete to creep back to its smoking ruins. It is something of a miracle that throughout the bombardment only two people were killed—a Chinaman, who returned to his store near the beach, no doubt for some cherished heirloom, in spite of repeated warnings, and a native youth, disembowelled by a fragment of shell, while in full flight to the hills.

On shore the scene was one of utter ruin. Beautiful Papeete was scarred with smouldering ash-heaps. The market, a fine building, where the principal trade of the town had been carried on, lay level with the ground, a heap of twisted girders and blackened galvanised iron. One

shell had ripped a clean passage through the roof of the club-house, and four other dwellings in a direct line, killed a horse and passed through a rabbit hutch, leaving its inmates unscathed, and finally buried itself in the hill-side at the back of the town. Another, in its passage along an avenue of flamboyant trees, had lopped the branches as cleanly as a garden shears.

Already carpenters were at work repairing the shattered buildings, natives lounged along the beach, and the ordinary, care-free life of Papeete had been resumed. There was no fear of the German cruisers returning, said the Commandant. Papeete possessed nothing that the Germans could hold even if captured. He was full of cheery assurance, the Commandant.

Later, when the velvety tropical darkness descended on hill and beach and town, the flames from the two thousand tons of burning coal danced, reflected in the still waters of the harbour, and bathed in roseate light the long avenue of trees. It was a weird sight—unreal, fantastic.

And it was amongst the ruins of Papeete that the Spinster and Freckles held council. They had learnt that the steamer that had brought them sailed at daylight the next morning, and that, owing to the appearance of German cruisers in the South Pacific, the next of the line might be postponed indefinitely. That all industries were at a standstill, and that to get from island to island was a sheer impossibility. Small wonder,

then, that they bowed their heads before this last edict of fate, and continued on their way.

"We have no business to regret—anything," announced the Spinster, as they sat in chairs on the boat deck. "What are our puny little affairs compared with war?"

"You're right," agreed Freckles, "but"—and here he drew from his pocket a well-known and battered pocket-book—"all the same I have here a rough plan of a useful kind of craft, and something rather fascinating in the way of routes. What do you say if we start here and——"

The Spinster said nothing, but for the rest of the day studied alternately a map of the world and a rough sketch of the *Wanderlust II.*

Some day, some day . . .

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The chequered cruise